

Il dolce suono (The Sweet Sound)

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Il dolce suono (The Sweet Sound)

by [lovelylaceandlilac](#)

Summary

What if swallowing Abigail's ear wasn't the only memory Hannibal buried?

“You hope to entice me with a coiffured hair and a pressed shirt.” Hannibal's voice is a sibilant sigh, the echo of a serpent in the garden long ago. “But the niceties of Man pale before the passions of Nature.”

Will shudders as the doctor's fingers ghost down his neck.

“Remember, mon précieux,” Hannibal intones darkly, “that when an wolf seeks to seduce they offer their throat.”

Benedetto il primo dolce affanno

Chapter Notes

Benedetto il primo dolce affanno – Blessed be the first sweet suffering ~ PETRARCA

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Will is tense when the Soprano floats on stage.

An apparition wrapped in white, face as pale as bone, her voice cutting through the eerie lilt of the flute.

She is splattered in red, and he isn't sure she's not Elise Nichols. Lithe and pale, sad eyes framed by smoke and nightmares.

“Donzetti wrote Lucia's aria for the glass harmonica. A sound unrivaled in its sorrowful lament.” Hannibal's steady whisper curls around Will's ear, a shadow shifting out of the corner of his eye. “It fell out of fashion when the musicians suffered lead poisoning and descended into insanity – la vie imite l'art.”

Will does not wonder about insanity now. Now that the Soprano playing Lucia glides on the stage, splattered in red, clutching the knife close to her bosom. She is heavily rouged under the lights, the round moon of her face cut harsh by grease paint and grief. Her voice opens as if to scream. Will thinks she looks strangled.

*Il dolce suono mi colpì di sua voce!
Ah, quella voce m'è qui nel cor discesa!*

The English translation lays unfurled in Will's lap. Hannibal would not hold it, considered it lewd, and ultimately unnecessary.

"The sweet sound of his voice struck me." Hannibal has leaned closer, the ghost of his breath seeping from the gloom. *"Ah, that voice has entered my heart."*

Lucia spreads her arms wide, arching up like a crescent moon. She has just stabbed her husband to death on her wedding night and is instead singing to her lover Edgardo.

Edgardo! io ti son resa. Edgardo! Ah! Edgardo, mio! Si', ti son resa!
fuggita io son da' tuoi nemici.

"Edgardo! I surrender to you, oh my Edgardo." Hannibal's voice is a sibilant sigh in the blackness, dark and supple. *"I have escaped from your enemies."*

~~~~~

Will is in the footholds of the mountains in Maryland, deep in Appalachian logging country, miles from the nearest town and the remnants of civilization.

There is a dead woman wrapped in silk, propped up between the roots of a willow tree. The silk is dark blue, embroidered with white cranes, their wings wrapping around her face and breasts, her legs buried in deep drifts of snow. They are on the banks of Wilst Creek, the sloping ridge behind them thick with a brier patches and rhododendron. The thorns and dead branches of the thickets poke through the snow like the downy of a baby bird.

The forensic team has photographed her and then unrolled her, spreading her naked body on the snow like a newborn. A starburst has been cut into the base of her spine back like a red poinsettia.

"He wrapped her up like a present." Crawford remarks.

Will sees the beginnings of the yellow pendulum in his mind. It is the first time since his release from prison he has been invited to a crime scene. It has become easier since then, easier since sending a man to kill Hannibal to slip into this.

“Not a present,” Hannibal demurs, coming to stand beside Will. Even as the visions take hold, Hannibal is here. “A funeral shroud.”

Crawford’s disembodied voice drifts towards Will, the yellow pendulum having erased the detective from the crime scene, his voice muted as if underwater. “The fabric isn’t anything local. The nearest town is Cumberland, they wouldn’t carry something like this.”

Will walks towards the body, the pendulum erasing the surrounding FBI, their cameras and navy jackets wiped clean. Only white snow and the willow tree remains, flanked by the hulking shadow of the briers like some terrible thorny sentinel.

“He ordered the fabric just for her.” Will kneels knee deep in snow, staring at rumpled silk beside her body. “His final gift to her.”

Hannibal kneels beside Will, gloved fingers tracing the embroidered birds. “In Japan, the crane symbolizes eternal youth. The original crane’s lifespan was fabled to be over a thousand years.”

“While hers was cut short in her twenties.” Will adjusts his glasses and turns her head. Her hair is dark brown and her eyes are blue, and for a second she looks like Abigail Hobbs, pale and freckled in the snow.

Will jerks back as if bitten, his vision blurring, the ring of dead branches becoming a lattice of pulsing black veins, the stag circling the clearing in the shadows.

Will shuts his eyes.

“In Greek mythology the cranes dance was a celebration of life. The crane was the bird of Apollo.” Even now, Hannibal’s voice reaches him. “The sun god was said to have disguised himself as a crane every time he visited the mortal world to walk amidst the dying.”

“Apollo was a god of healing.” Will sees himself carry Abigail here, crossing her white arms over her chest like wings. Wrapping her in silk, closing her eyelids and kissing her forehead. “He didn’t heal her.”

“He walked amidst her.” Hannibal’s voice is a distorted whisper, curling around the edges of Will’s mind. “And does she not live eternally in his memory now?”

“He knew her in real life.” Will sees Abigail under the willow tree in the spring, daffodils growing around her thighs and white foxtails tickling her ankles. “Knew her and loved her.”

“And do we not covet what we love?” Hannibal’s voice is a low murmur. Impossibly close, settling in the marrow of his bones.

Will opens his eyes.

The ring of dead branches have become a thicket of black antlers, framing Hannibal’s head like a crown of thorns.

There is no salvation here.

~~~~~

They are walking to the opera. Will has come to be cultured armed with a pressed shirt and a bottle of aspirin. He feels slick with perspiration, rivulets of his past sweating out his pores, making his jacket sticky like a Louisiana summer. He is a mechanic’s son, an uncouth fisherman who reeks of cheap cologne and self-loathing.

He watches Hannibal proffer the tickets. The teller is an older woman, sporting the puff of blue grey-feathered coiffure all women over seventy default to.

She hands Will a pamphlet - *Lucia di Lammermoor* – The English translation quickly curling around Will's sweaty fist.

“English,” Hannibal drawls softly as he leads Will inside, “The guttural consonants, the Germanic roots – harsh with Ostsiedlung history and exacting gerunds – words of Celts and Gauls rooming oak forests and worshipping pagan gods.”

Hannibal guides to Will their seats, eyes shifting in the warm glow of refitted gas lamps. The theater twinkles with them, heavy laden from the ceiling like candles at Catholic mass. They have a private box to the right of the stage, opulent and secluded.

Will seats himself and opens the program.

“Donzetti never meant English to tarnish these words” Hannibal watches Will as he slowly plucks the transcript from his limp fist. “Only Italian, the language of the *Divina Commedia*, is fit to carry Lucia's lament.”

Will pops a dry aspirin and cracks a smile. It feels like plaster peeling from his lips.

“Not a comedy then?”

Hannibal grins, shark eyes black in the flickering light.

“No.”

~~~~~

“What do you think is the significance of the bones?”

Will is standing by the window in Hannibal’s office. Tufts of snow are falling outside, frost clinging to the glass. This morning he tried to shoot Hannibal in his kitchen. This evening they consulted on a crime and now he is at his old therapy appointment.

He should have killed him.

He still might.

Hannibal walks behind Will, the deliberate steps of a man who can be silent but chooses not to.

It is meant to put him at ease, Will thinks.

“She was missing her lower vertebra.” Will keeps his eyes on the snow, his voice professional. “He carved it out of the base of her spine with a hunting knife while she was still alive.”

“That is what was done.” The footsteps stop, Hannibal is behind Will now. “Not what it means.”

“He wrapped her body in raw silk and left her under sitting upright under a weeping willow.” Will frowns softly. “He loved her. He was trying to honor her.”

Outside Hannibal’s window there is a small courtyard with a Japanese garden. A single willow tree drooped over a koi pond with a small bridge, a stone lantern, and a winding path. Jagged rocks jut out of the snow-drifts like crooked teeth.

Hannibal shifts to Will’s right, his hand descending on Will’s shoulder.

Will suppresses a flinch. He will not give Hannibal the pleasure of seeing his discomfort.

“My Aunt once told me a ghost will appear wherever a willow grows.” Hannibal’s voice is close and warm. “That one is for my sister.”

“There is no need to memorialize the living.” Will shakes his head slowly, resisting the urge to bolt. “Our killer would not need her ghost had he left her alive.”

Hannibal nods in Will’s periphery, his hand moving to slowly clasp the back of Will’s neck.

Will freezes.

“Do you know the names of our bones?”

The air of the room feels indescribably warm and thick. Will feels his stomach roll with nausea, his legs tense as if to run.

“No.”

Hannibal’s hand slowly drift down Will’s spine, pressing lightly over each curve. Will is overwhelmed by sudden *déjà vu*.

It is dark and familiar, clawing desperately inside Will's head, like frantic mice trapped in his skull.

Hannibal's fingers are drifting lower, his voice congenial.

“You have thirty three vertebrae divided into five regions.” Hannibal stops at the base of Will’s spine, his fingers gently pressing on either side. “Our killer took the sacrum, from the

Latin *os sacrum* – holy or sacred bone.”

Hannibal leans closer, his breath wrapping around Will’s neck like a coil.

The mice are screeching now.

“The sacrum was the part of the animal offered in sacrifice.” Will closes his eyes, the noose tightening. “The Greek’s believed the bone was indestructible. It was thought to be the seat of the human soul.”

The clawing feels like a memory. Something desperately important, something frightened and hungry.

Will deliberately turns his head, meeting Hannibal’s eyes. He can play this game. He can retrieve what is lost.

“You think our killer meant to take her soul.”

Hannibal smiles, a slow unfurling of lips and teeth.

“Have you never wanted to possess someone?”

~~~~

Jimmy Price is humming Katy Perry's “California Girls” as he retrieves a latent print off the victim's pupil.

Will had come in to see Beth LeBeau's body again, come to redeem himself after mucking the crime scene and theatrically losing time. But team sassy science is occupied with other corpses.

“It's a partial.” Price chirps, waving his left hand in exuberance. “Probably a fragment of a thumb and a bit of the palm!”

Will shuffles stiffly besides the sterile work station, the notes of saccharine pop music still ringing in his ears.

“Lucky bastard” Zeller laughs, nudging Price in the ribs. “You should have never seen the sucker. Stood out against the eight ball hemorrhage from the gunshot wound.”

Will swallows audibly. At least audible to him.

Everything is audible to him.

“You know how it goes.” Price starts singing again. “Mur-dered Gi-rls, they're unfor-get-able...”

Will stares at the girl laid out, blue and cold, eyes unflinching on the table.

“fine, *fresh...*” Price gives the corpse's arm teasing squeeze “fierce...”

The body turns her head towards Will, her disembodied voice echoing from her upturned mouth. Tongue cocked like a revolver, the whirl of cylinders spinning behind wide eyes.

“The boys, break their neck, trying to creep a little sneak peek”

Will shifts again. The girl is grinning, tongue cocked in that empty chamber.

Always smiling, just for him.

Just for *him*.

Pendulum orange and he has backed up, has knocked over a drawer, metal instruments crashing to the floor like so much shrapnel.

Will feels shot.

“She's smiling.” He gasps, words hurling to the floor like the litter of broken instruments at his feet.

Every face turns towards him now.

Price is no longer singing. The silence stretches thick, labored breathing on the other end of the call, the pregnant pause of the audience.

Will's audience.

“She's slack jawed.” Zeller coughs, eyes darting to the side.

“Yes.” Will turns and the girl comes into focus, stiff on the table, eyes wide and mouth forming a perfect hardened oval. “what I had meant...”

Will stares.

There was no smile. No Glasgow grin. Or was that Beth LeBeau?

Bleeding Beth. Smiling next to her bed, face cut ear to ear, grinning on the hardwood floor.

The floor isn't hardwood here. It's linoleum, cold and sterile.

The drawer is still in place.

He can feel the fever coming, feel its yellow pulse in his skull throbbing with the swinging pendulum. Always the pendulum.

“What you had meant?” Price parrots, his own mouth falling open in a mocking O, matching the corpse, that grinning corpse.

No Glasgow grin. Or was that Beth LeBeau?

“What I had meant” Will looks up shifting, shifting against the current of the room. “Was what if she was smiling before death. A smile for *him*. Could we....tell?”

“No.” Zeller elongates the vowel as if speaking to a child. “Muscles release after death. Body goes slack. The jaw goes slack.”

Will nods.

The corpse is smiling at him again. Water dripping from her eyes, falling to the puddle forming on the floor, running down the morgue drawers.

Will nods, pops 2 aspirin, and leaves.

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“I’m going to remember, Dr Lector.” It is his second therapy appointment since release. Will’s back is as straight as the spine of the girl under the Willow tree. Unmoving, unyielding, set by rigor mortis and betrayal. “I’m going to remember what you did to me.”

Hannibal leans across the chair, black eyes shining like a reaper.

“And when I do...”

Will clenches his fist, feeling his breath hitch and his legs burn.

“There will be a reckoning.”

Hannibal smiles at this, a flicker of his tongue, his head reared back like a snake regarding it’s prey.

Regarding his meal.

“My *dearest* Will,” Hannibal lilts, savoring the familiarity on his tongue. “Memory is a funny thing. Much like Prophecy, our mind speaks in riddles.”

Will chokes, sudden déjà vu stealing the air from his lungs.

Hannibal rises, slowly circling around Will’s chair to the bookshelf on the wall.

“The Greeks believed prophesy was the gift of madness.” Will resists the urge to turn, to track the predator at his back.

Hannibal leans down, breath ghosting across Will's left ear.

“And in madness there is always truth.” The words are a serpent's hiss. “as well as lies.”

Will's stomach churns lightning, his fists clenched in his thigh. Something bubbles under the surface of his skin, pickles inside his mind.

He is not afraid.

“The phantoms you recall may not be their true form.” Hannibal's voice is closer now, threading through his hair, through his veins. “Do not mistake forms for the essences they represent.”

“And what are those essences,” Will resists the urge to turn, to bare his teeth at the devil at his back. “Dr Lector?”

Hannibal smiles, placing his hand on Will's shoulder, a hot brand scalding through cloth and flesh.

“The essential ones,”

His fingers flex.

“The human ones.”

Kneading into Will's shoulder, through tendon and bone.

“Courage.”

Hannibal leans closer now, impossibly close.

“Hatred.”

His hand sliding up Will's shoulder.

“Lust”

A single finger brushing Will's neck.

“Fear.”

And there is a riot of fire behind Will's eyes, a boiling in his blood. And if he does not move, does not snarl and crush this demon against the wall, fingers around his neck, he will surely implode.

“Love.”

The offending word tastes like bile, the body's betrayal, something half consumed and rejected.

“Hunger.”

And Hannibal is gone, his fingers leaving the sensation of a scar as prominent as the line around Abigail Hobbs neck.

And Will sits silent, alive and tormented.

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Chapter End Notes

Hi Everyone,

I hope you enjoy what I hope to be an (eventually) dark and smutty retelling of season 2. If anyone is interested I am in desperate need of a beta reader and someone to help tease plot lines so hit me up if that's your scene.

Finally if you like it please comment. As a piddling writer my ego is the size of a pea and your feedback is the biggest inspiration to write more (sad but true). This is my first dabble at something full sized in the Hannibal fandom. Its only because of positive comments from my one shot and the fabulous itsbeautiful who never stopped reading and encouraging that this story is even taking shape. So please, your comments mean the world to me!

ch'i' ebbi ad esser con Amor congiunto

Chapter Summary

What if swallowing Abigail's ear wasn't the only memory Hannibal buried?

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“Remember, mon précieux,” Hannibal intones darkly, “that when an wolf seeks to seduce they offer their throat.”

Chapter Notes

Benedetto il primo dolce affanno
ch'i' ebbi ad esser con Amor congiunto,

Blessed be the first sweet suffering
that I felt in being conjoined with Love,

~ PETRARCA

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter 2

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The lights dim, the opera house turns almost black as the curtains slowly open.

The stage is the grounds of a castle. A man stalks forward, a chorus of guards behind him. They are searching for something or someone, flickering lanterns held high, weapons drawn.

The first man pauses and shouts, his voice soaring through the air.

*Percorrete le spiagge vicine...*

Will frowns.

The chorus circles closer now, waving their torches and echoing.

*Percorriamo le spiagge vicine!*

Their voices blur together in a rush of unintelligible sounds. It washes over Will like a curse, a dark incantation in the gloom.

*...della torre le vaste rovine*

Will shifts uncomfortably. His skin prickles with heat and he suddenly longs for the translation, something to dissuade his sense of dread.

*...della torre le vaste rovine*

“Can I have the translation back?” Will whispers sharper than he intended, relaxing as it appears the opera box prevented his voice from carrying.

“You cannot read it in the dark.” Hannibal tsks, “Turning on a light would be rude.”

*...cada il vel di sì turpe mistero,  
lo domanda, l'impone l'onor.*

“Hannibal...” Will falters, trying to find a name for his discomfort, the dizziness as the chorus shouts and soars. He feels unhinged, and the music is closing in.

Hannibal looks at him. Dissecting Will in the dark.

He nods once, leaning closer.

“My Italian is excellent.” Hannibal whispers, gesturing at the box around them. “We have privacy. I will tell you what is necessary.”

Will sighs in relief.

*...cada il vel di sì turpe mistero,  
lo impone l'onor.*

“Tear the veil from so vile a secret,” Hannibal whispers, placing his hand on Will's arm in the gloom, “honor demands it.”

Will looks down at Hannibal's hand. The touch feels forbidden in the dark. Therapist and friend, blurred lines and familiarity in the blackness.

*Splenderà l'esecrabile vero  
come lampo fra nubi d'orror,*

Hannibal's voice ghosts across Will's ear, warm and intimate.

“The hateful truth will shine out,” Hannibal intones softly, “like a lightning flash through clouds of horror,”

*splenderà l'esecrabile vero,*

Will shivers at the morbid translation, the words' horror suspended in his mind like frozen drops of blood.

“The hateful truth will shine,” Hannibal's touch is warm; a contrast to the cold dread Will feels building in his stomach.

The spotlight moves and the torch held by the lead singer casts a shadowy crown behind his head, black antlers reaching across the stage to impale the chorus.

Will remembers Cassie Boyle mounted on a stag's head covered in crows.

*cada il vel di sì turpe mistero,*

“Tear the veil from so vile a secret,”

Will wonders about secrets, about the Copy Cat and the Chesapeake Ripper and blood in the blackness.

*...lo vuol l'onor.*

“...honour expects it.”

Wonders if he will ever see through clouds of horror.

~~~~

Will is circling Miriam Lass in Jack's office. He realizes offhandedly that the motion is threatening. He doesn't mean it to be. Miriam may be a trap, but it is not one set for him.

“Jack told me you were the only man with a practical understanding of the Ripper.” Miriam's voice is hesitant but determined. “He didn't tell me you were also a victim”

“A victim?” Will tastes the word on his tongue and perceives its flavor to be vile. “I was an inmate at the Baltimore State Hospital for the criminal insane curtsy of the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“That's” Miriam pauses, pursing her lips, “different from what I expected of him.”

Will frowns, wondering what she would have expected.

“Jack tells me that you don't remember much about what the Ripper did to you.”

Miriam blinks rapidly like a startled rabbit.

“I couldn't remember either.” Will confides slowly.

Miriam looks up and falters.

“Couldn't?”

“Oh I remember now. Well, not all of it. Pieces. I recovered fragments in prison.” Will smiles bitterly. “I was under his influence.”

Will resists the urge to ball his hands into fists. This conversation is more painful than he had intended it to be.

“He used some kind of light to induce a seizure response in my brain. It created blackouts and lost time.”

Miriam looks up nervously, like a cornered animal.

“What would he do to you during the blackouts?”

Will stops circling, head snapping up. Suddenly the air was heavier, thicker.

“What?”

“They must have served a purpose.” Miriam's eyes dart around the room. “What was that purpose?”

“To make me think I was a murderer.” Will relaxed, her question now innocuous. “So when I looked back on days, there were times I could not account for.”

Miriam nodded her head. “So he took you to his crime scenes during the blackouts?”

Will paused, something black pooling in the pit of his stomach. The light was slanting through the blinds of the room and the angles were harsh and discordant.

“No.” Will started slowly. “He always kept me in his office.”

Miriam furrows her brows as if confused, then nods. “Some place private.”

Will shudders and agrees. “Some place private.”

“I remember chamber music.” She confesses. “The music would fill me up and wash over my skin. Make the loneliness of my isolation more bearable, the lack of contact and touch.”

Will freezes.

“He never touched you?” His words are faltering, his skin itches like it is pulled too tight.

“Only when he injected me to take my arm. I only knew a kind detached voice and the smell of fresh flowers. No contact.”

Will knows this is wrong, knows it deep within his gut.

Hannibal always touched him.

His skin burned now, boiled with phantom caresses.

Hannibal's touch.

Hannibal, stroking his bare skin with relish, as if he were something precious to be consumed.

“You will have to excuse me.” Will gasps, stumbling towards the door. “We will continue this conversation later.”

~~~~

Will was feeling traumatized when Hannibal instructs him to lie on the couch.

“You crouch as if you were Atlas.” Hannibal murmurs. “Arms drawn in, the world tight upon your shoulders. If you do not uncoil the sinews of your body how can we permeate the fabric of your mind?”

“I didn't know where I was.” Will shudders as he lies down. “Beth LeBeau was under my knees, my hands holding the knife that slashed her face.”

“You lost time.”

“I lost more than time.” Will sighs, sinking into the couch.

“I want you to watch the light.” Hannibal intones, carefully placing the metronome on the small table next to the couch. “I want you to sync the rhythm of its switch to the beat of your heart. Hear its tick replace the chorus in your mind.”

Will tenses despite himself, feels anxiety come on in harsh discordant chords.

“Empty your mind Will.” Hannibal pulls his chair forward across the room, placing his hand on Will's arm. Will tenses at the contact, something inside his head clawing against his skull. “Fill yourself only with the clock and the sound of my voice.”

The ticking sound magnifies, like footsteps down a hallway, following him into the depths of his memories. Will can feel it drowning his senses, drowning his skull like the fever that has

surely taken hold.

“The clock Will.” Hannibal's voice surrounds him. “Listen to the clock.”

Will aches, the room swims.

Something is wrong. Terribly, terribly wrong.

Will opens his mouth as if to cry out, as if to scream.

Instead he feels his body seize, unbearably tight. And suddenly there is only white light and softness. Hannibal is stroking Will's arm, muttering soothing sounds, lips close to his ear.

And Will feels pliant, pliant and warm as Hannibal strokes his skin. Strokes his arm slowly with relish.

~~~~~

Will contemplates the memory as he feeds his dogs. Contemplates it again as they brush against his legs and piles around his feet in the bed, all warm and clumsy.

He is touch starved and he knows it. Was touch starved long before prison, long before Hannibal.

Alana had been the first person he had shared a kiss with in years.

It's not Alana's memory that sends an ache in his belly though.

Hannibal violated his trust. Made him helpless.

Somewhere in the anger something worse seethes.

And Will cannot help but pick the scab.

~~~

When Miriam shoots Chilton everyone believes him absolved.

Of course Chilton planted the seed of Hannibal's guilt in Will. Poor demented Will, broken and tormented, half crazy and desperate enough to believe it.

When Will calls Alana the next morning for memory recovery he can feel her excitement over the phone.

He may be something unspeakably ugly now, ugly enough to have sent a man to kill Hannibal, but she will fix him. She will find out what Chilton did and restore Will to the meek man who collects dogs and avoids eye contact.

She is practically giddy when he steps in her office.

Will hides behind his glasses, posturing the unassuming man, manipulated and shaken.

The manipulation doesn't feel the same as sending a man to kill Hannibal. It's less powerful.

But it tastes similar

“Can we use the light timer?” His stomach flutters at the suggestion, he balls his fist. “Ha-Chilton used it on me.”

Alana smiles her approval, drawing a metronome out on her desk and gesturing for him to sit.

“Do you want to start with drawing a clock?” Alana asks gently.

“If I never draw another clock it won't be a moment too soon.” Will doesn't mean the edge in his voice, it is more authentic then the mask he is trying on should be.

“Fair enough.” Alana nods her reassurance. “I want you to watch the timer Will, listen to the sound of my voice.”

Will tries to relax, tries to take himself back to Hannibal's office, to red walls and leather books amidst a mind on fire.

Instead his muscles tense and electricity sparks through his blood.

“Will relax,” Alana intones softly, reaching for his hand. “*You are with a friend.*”

And with that, that comforting touch, he can feel the world dissolve like sugar on the tongue, hear the metronome tick and his pulse thrum.

~~~~

The box is ticking, throbbing, the light swaying back and forth with a steady hum.

Will can see the waves of white flicker behind his eyes, like wings of a dove taking flight.

“I want you to draw a clock.”

Will is in Hannibal's office, fire burning in hearth, fever burning in his head. The walls loom long and orange against the dying light, books illuminated in the shadowy recesses, their spines stacked like leather brickwork.

Will feels sick with the warmth that radiates from the hearth, soaking into his pores, boiling his blood in a humid sticky heat.

“Will, I want you to draw a clock.” Hannibal intones, voice slick like summer rain on asphalt.

Like a summer storm, shadows gathering in the gloom.

Will wonders why he isn't wet.

“Do you require assistance?”

And Hannibal is moving, parting the shadows to emerge before Will's chair. Will feels the brand of flesh as Hannibal braces one hand on Will's knee, the other hand coming to close around Will's right hand.

There is a notebook in his lap.

Hannibal begins to move Will's hand in slow deliberate motions, the pen scratching across paper, his hand sliding forward to slide up and down Will's arm in a retreating caress.

Will is pliant once more. Always pliant here with the sounds of the clock and the sickening warmth.

Will shudders as his body goes soft, wonders if his bones have melted into marrow. It's as if Hannibal is painting his arm in languid strokes, fingers tracing patterns in his skin, painting him red and purple.

Colors of heat and passion.

Will wonders, if Hannibal split him open like a ripe summer melon, what color would he be?

“You are quite warm.” Hannibal whispers, fingers now rubbing circles on Will's wrist, stroking his pulse. “Warmed by the hearth of my house. The home is the framework upon which we rest our dreams of contentment.”

Will feels Hannibal tap his fingers against Will's forehead, knocking as if to be let in.

“Tell me, when you traverse the darkest corridors of your mind,” Hannibal murmurs, leaning forward, “is it my home you seek?”

Will sees the hallway stretched before him, fingers tracing the varnish of pine paneling. Sees Hannibal at the end of his childhood foyer, opening the door to the kitchen, 60's mustard appliances replaced with the sleek minimalism of stainless steel and grey.

Hannibal's kitchen.

“I see you in places I used to dwell.” Will closes his eyes and the shudders as the blackness rolls in. “Places that have become your own.”

Hannibal smiles, hand falling from Will's forehead to cup his cheek.

“The things that stir our heart imprint upon our memories. You seek solace in the presence of a loved one beneath the roof of your beginnings.”

Will tilts his cheek towards Hannibal's hand, feeling the walls of the room ebb and retract with the heat Hannibal's pulse.

“Will, do you know what time it is?”

Will shakes his head, Hannibal's fingers slowly trailing down his neck.

“It is eight in the evening Will.”

Will can only nod, feeling warmth trill up his spine like holiday sparklers.

“And do you know where you are?”

Will frowns. Where is he? He used to know but now it has blurred together. Like words on a page when he squints, black lines dancing into one another in a grey haze.

But Hannibal is here.

“I am with a friend.”

Hannibal's smile splits the dark, arching upwards as his eyes gleam like chips of flint.

“Yes.” Hannibal's hand drifts down, closing on Will's thigh. “You are with a friend.”

~~~~

“Do you think of him when you touch the scar?” Will can feel something dark ebb between them as Abigail traces the flesh of her neck beneath her scarf.

The same dark thing that grows inside him.

Abigail cocks her head, blue eyes narrowing.

“Does it make you uncomfortable?” Her voice is calculating.

Will shifts on the bench and stares at the foliage in the greenhouse of the group home. There is a broken fountain, a wheelbarrow, and grass growing through cracked flagstone.

If Will pauses, he can feel the grass growing through him, weaving roots through his veins and popping out his pores.

“There are better times to visit than the wounds he gave.” Will remarks.

“Normalcy? The times he play acted for society don't have the answers I want.” Abigail frowns. “And nothing is more honest than the touch we leave behind.”

Will watches as the stag grazes in the distance.

Wonders when it will eat at bloody grass at his feet.

~~~~

Will breaks into Alana's office to steal the metronome the day after their memory recovery session.

An ache had built in his groin at the recovered memory, and he had gotten hard and confused, had stumbled out of their session with her voice trailing concerned behind him.

“What did you see?”

If only she knew. What he saw is irrelevant. What he remembers is increasingly less concerning than his reaction towards it. Towards the thing growing inside him.

He takes the metronome anyway.

Steals it late at night, when he is alone with his shadows.

He drives home like a bat out of hell, covered in nervous sweat, the metronome on the seat beside him.

Will understands, the way an animal senses its end and goes to find solitude, he must face this demon without Miriam or Alana.

And as he places the metronome on the table and slowly strokes his thigh in the dark, he wonders if he isn't going mad again.

~~~~

Will shifts in the opera box.

There is scarlet all around him. The velvet curtains, the seats, the plush carpet of the opera box – all throb and pulse like opened veins.

He feels as if he is swimming in blood.

Hannibal grasps Will's arm and startles him forward, lurching away as if burned. Hannibal is unphased - his steady hand remaining coiled around Will's elbow like a brand.

Will feels dizzy at the touch.

“The second aria is commencing.” Hannibal whispers. “Regnava nel Silenzio.”

Two women emerge from wings to stand next to a crumbling fountain on stage. One of them seems distraught, she clutches her companion and points to the fountain, her voice arching up into the darkness in a shrill vibrato.

*Incauta! A che mi traggi?*

Avventurarti or che il fratel qui venne, è folle ardir.

Will frowns, wishing again Hannibal had not plucked away the translation.

*“Rash girl. What have you brought me to?”* Hannibal whispers. *“Daring to come here, the spot is madness.”*

Will turns, startled. The word madness lodged in his throat.

“Lucia is waiting in the garden with her maid for her lover Edgardo.” Hannibal chuckles softly, sensing Will's discomfort. “She sings of romance and the past, of the girl murdered here that haunts this cursed place.”

Will coughs politely. “Morbid settings for a love song.”

“Passion meant something dark and unbridled before the days of greeting cards and saccharine cupids.” Hannibal smiles sharply. “Lucia's declaration of love in the midst of ghosts foreshadows her own demise.”

“Not all lovers end up like Romeo and Juliette.”

Hannibal turns his head, regarding Will with an inscrutable purse of lips.

“Love was a thing of danger and death, lust and thunder. The poetry lies not in lover's demise but in the passion that bore two people into each other's arms, blind to all consequence.”

Hannibal smiles sharply, his gaze baring into Will, flaying him raw.

“A beautiful thing to behold when the mind gives way. And yet,” Hannibal shifts, his hand grasping Will more firmly, “the fires of the flesh are nothing compared to the yearning of the heart.”

Will flushes, his body suddenly hollow. He aches all over.

Whether it is the fever or something else he is unsure.

*Quella fonte, ah!...Mai senza tremar non veggo*

Lucia's voice arches up suddenly and Will's head snaps towards the stage, startled.

*Ah, tu lo sai. Un Ravenswood, ardendodi geloso furor, l'amata donna  
colà trafisse; e l'infelice cadde nell'onda, ed ivi rimanea sepolta*

Will turns towards Hannibal, questioning.

*“You know the tale.” Hannibal leans forward whispering. “A Ravenswood, mad with jealousy,  
stabbed his sweetheart here; and the poor girl fell into the water which became her tomb.”*

The orchestra swells, smoke pours forth on the stage like foam breaking against the beach

Will shudders as an apparition slowly emerges on stage.

She looks like Abigail, blue doe eyes and milk white skin. Red blooms across her smock  
where the antlers came through, a dusting of scarlet flowers in death's thrall.

But Abigail is alive and well.

Only Will feels dead.

*Qual di chi parla muoversi il labbro suo vedea,  
e con la mano esanime chiamarmi a sé pare;*

*“I saw her lips moving as if she were speaking,” Hannibal murmurs, voice impossibly low in  
the blackness. “And with her lifeless hand she seemed to beckon me to her.”*

Abigail lurches on the stage, arms outstretched in supplication.

And Will sees it, the shadow behind her. A gaunt demon, a shifting nightmare of ribs and antlers, dead eyes and long claws.

Elise Nicholas is singing now, singing with Abigail and the chorus of the dead, throats opened wide, smocks splattered red.

And Hannibal is pressed against him, hand moving to Will's wrist, lips hovering behind Will's ear in a sick heat.

*Chiari, oh Dio! Ben chiari e tristi nel tuo dir presagi intendo!*

Abigail is crying, sobbing, the sound spiraling around Will like water down a drain.

And Elise turns towards the audience, towards Will, screaming in their vibrato.

*“Oh God, in your story, clear and grave are the omens I see!”*

Hannibal is smiling, he can feel the doctor's lips curling behind his ear. And Will wonders at the contact, at boundaries in the blackness. The branding touch as Hannibal lifts Will's hand and places it over Will's beating chest.

The horned shadow is stalking forward and Will's stomach clenches, heavy and burning. His breath is coming in startled gasps.

*Ah, Lucia, Lucia, desisti da un amor così tremendo.*

And Will tries to swallow, tries not to smell death. To feel Abigail's throat under his hands, Hannibal's hand on his heart.

*“Ah, Lucia, Lucia, abandon this terrifying love.”*

Will licks his lips.

He tastes only blood.

~~~~~

Will feels the prick of the needle.

Feels it pierce him, enter him in a cold press of sterile metal.

The light is there, throbbing, hot and white. Once again Will feels boneless.

“This is to help you relax, Will.” Hannibal coos, his voice arching over each syllable. “To help you recover what's deep inside.”

Will does not know what he is meant to recover as the current of memories take hold. As he turns weightless and hollow.

Will remembered traveling as a boy, riding in the car those hot Louisiana summers, seats sticky beneath his legs.

He does not remember the inside of the house, just the molted yellow paint and the torn screen door.

He remembers the bayou.

Remembers navigating the swamp at dusk, dark waters of shifting shadows, bald cypress dressed in drooping Spanish moss.

He remembers the ocean.

Waves black like an oil spill, smashing the side of his boat with the rhythmic slap of a baker pounding dough.

“I dreamt of being a sailor.” Will murmurs, feeling the soft breeze against his skin. “I would sail at night through the blackness.”

Hannibal hums, moving Will's arms like a puppet, peeling off his shirt like he would the skin of an orange.

The light is still there, white and throbbing.

Will feels empty, limp, and pliant.

“Will, do you know where you are?” Hannibal intones softly.

Will shakes his head, stopping when he feels everything in his skull slosh, like water in a fishbowl threatening to spill out.

“You are between time and space.” Hannibal's teeth trace the shell of Will's ear lightly.

“Between waking and dreaming. A sacred space where the veneer of human falsehood can be stripped bare.”

Will feels Hannibal's hand's run down the planes of his chest, pausing to flick open the buttons of his fly.

“You are so lovely when your masks fall away, Will.” Hannibal's voice surrounds him. Will gasps, arches as he feels warmth enclose around his cock.

“You will always be honest with me here, when we are in this place.”

Will can only nod, can only give a throaty moan as Hannibal begins to stroke him lightly beneath his briefs, firm fingers pressing past cotton and into heated skin.

Hannibal is behind Will, they are on the couch suspended in time and space. Will watches the dust motes as Hannibal's other hand grasps his throat and squeezes lightly, his other hand slowly stroking Will in a rhythmic heat.

Will feels his head pulled back, feels fingers enter his mouth and he sucks on instinct, jutting his hips into the warmth currently holding him.

He wonders if he is melting.

“So lovely.” Hannibal murmurs again, sucking the skin behind Will's ear. “So utterly enchanting when you are helpless.”

Will feels the hand on his throat tighten, feels himself harden in response. Hannibal speeds up.

The pressure increases.

He cannot breathe.

In an odd way, it is as if he is being embraced, anchored firmly in place as the air slowly leaves him. As the needy throb in his cock spreads to his chest and behind his eyes, blocking out everything but the rapid pulse of his heart beat and the strokes of Hannibal's hand.

He doesn't want it to stop.

He can only jut his hips and moan, moan and gasp as the world narrows to pinpoints, as dizziness melds with pleasure, as his blood hums and the room goes black.

“Cedi, cedi a me, cedi, cedi all'amor,” Hannibal whispers, *“sempre.”*

Hannibal releases Will suddenly. Oxygen comes rushing back in jagged breaths and Will aches at the loss of contact and the loss of pressure.

The room is too bright, too hot. He wants to be doused.

Shapes loom into view. Will feels vast and empty, like a stone must feel when cast into the murky depths of the pond.

Rushing towards the dark water.

Hannibal shifts, moves off the couch to come around in front of Will.

Will leans heavily into Hannibal's thigh. His throat feels naked, his cock cold. He is dizzy at the loss of contact, as if he has lost his anchor and been left to drift.

“Tell me your deepest desires, il mio falchetto.” Hannibal whispers, reaching down to softly stroke Will's hair.

“I want.” Will's mind churns sluggishly, as if the thoughts are too thick and heavy. His words come out hoarse and strange, as if the inside of his skull is stuffed with cotton.

“I don't.” Will tries again, the words coming out faltering and slurred. “I can't think.”

“Then do not think, lovely thing.” Hannibal coos softly. “You have come to the altar of the flesh, not the temple of the mind. You do not need the clatter of indecision here.”

Will closes his eyes, feeling them bob in his skull like buoys in the ocean. Dizziness overtakes him again. He is cold without his shirt.

He doesn't understand.

He only wants.

He feels Hannibal guide his hand up, reaching up to tangle in Hannibal's fly and the silk of his briefs. Once freed Hannibal is hard and hot against his face, something warm and real. Will struggles to focus his drifting thoughts, these drifting sensations.

He cannot think.

He only wants closeness.

“Open your mouth, darling boy.” Hannibal murmurs softly, firm fingers stroking Will's jaw. “Let me demonstrate how your tender form entices me.”

Will opens wide, feeling only warmth and desire as Hannibal fills him whole.

~~~~

Will breaks the metronome afterwards.

He doesn't go to work the next morning, ignores Jack's calls late afternoon. He lies in bed, aching to touch himself, not daring to give in.

Hannibal has cursed him with something worse than hate.

He no longer wonders if he has gone insane.

Only a madman would crave the devil's touch.

~~~~

Edgardo meets Lucia by the crumbling fountain. Tall and handsome, he sings of love despite their family's bitter war. He is not afraid, his tenor is rich and full, his voice confident and steady.

“Edgardo must leave for France.” Hannibal whispers in the dark enclosure of the opera box, his eyes burning like coals. “But he cannot bear to deny his heart any longer. He must consummate his love.”

Hannibal's hand comes out of the darkness to tap against Will's chest. His fingers are firm, the touch lingering in the shadows. Will feels his skull throb, the floor beneath him buck and lurch like the bow of a ship. The room continues to pulse and spin and Will holds his breath, waiting for the nightmare creature to appear on the stage again, waiting for the madness to wash him away entirely.

Instead Edgardo bends the knee and offers Lucia a ring.

*Qui di sposa eterna fede,
qui mi giura al cielo innante.*

Hannibal's hand has stopped tapping, instead it hovers, steady over Will's heart. Will slowly shivers, suddenly missing the contact, feeling hollowed out and uncertain in the pulse of the fever's lurid heat.

“Here, pledge yourself eternally”, Hannibal leans forward and whispers in the dark, his hand falling away to grasp Will's arm, “before Heaven to be my bride.”

The fog has lifted. The stars are twinkling in the canopy above the stage but their light seems distant and dim in the darkness. Will watches Lucia gaze at Edgardo with adoration, the only other source of light on the stage, her beacon in the blackness.

She has someone. Someone to guide her through the night.

In the box to the right, Garret Jacob Hobbs turns and smiles at Will.

al tuo fato unisco il mio....

son tuo sposo.

Will can feel Edgardo's voice enter his body like liquid, the music sliding down his chest and spreading through his stomach like warm brandy.

Garret Jacob Hobbs raises his hand and points at Will, grinning in the gloom.

“To your destiny I link mine...”

The words curl around Hannibal's tongue and rest on Will's heart. He closes his eyes and fights to breathe. Hannibal is here now. Something jagged has lodged in his throat, and it tastes frighteningly close to longing.

The lovers embrace on stage.

Will gives a strangled utterance.

Hannibal turns towards him, his face solid in a way Will wishes he could sink into.

Hobbs slowly stands, rising like a demon out of Will's periphery.

“I am yours” Hannibal whispers.

And in the dark, in the furtive blackness of the theater, Will pretends that Hannibal is not just translating the duet.

That Will is not alone with his ghosts.

*Ah, soltanto il nostro foco
spegnerà di morte il gel.*

Hobbs raises his hand higher. “See?” he hisses.

Hannibal's hand on Will's arm is firm, something solid in this waking nightmare. Will slumps forward, leaning against Hannibal, his head dropping on the doctor's shoulder.

“Ah,” Hannibal whispers fiercely into Will's hair. “only icy death can quench our passion.”

Will closes his eyes, the echo of Hobbs' whisper still trailing in the air.

~~~~

They say killers and victims alike feel compelled to return to the scene of the crime.

Will has no other place to return to anyway.

“I am slowly recovering the pieces. Like a mosaic the shards are finally taking shape and form.”

Will sits in Hannibal's office, painfully aware of the couch across from them. The couch where Will sat and sucked Hannibal's cock with reckless abandon.

How Hannibal had shot him up, molested and fucked him.

Will had sat there like some lurid nightmare. Drugged, drooling and begging for more.

“A mosaic is built of broken pottery.” Hannibal intones. “The images they create bear no resemblance to their original forms. Tell me Will, what memories are you building in the dim murals of your mind?”

Will shifts stiffly and tries not to stare at the couch, tries not to imagine choking on Hannibal, fingers in his hair, cock heavy and hard as Hannibal uses him.

Will had enjoyed it.

And he hates himself for it.

“Shattered mirrors in the dark,” Will swallows harshly, “they still reflect the image of the one who broke them.”

“Is that what you are picturing now?” Hannibal tilts his head to the side, smiling. “My breaking you?”

Will sees himself bent over the couch, softly moaning as Hannibal spreads him open and slowly fingers him.

It's not a memory, but it feels like one.

“Yes.” Will grits his teeth. Wishing to cut Hannibal's throat, to spring across the room and snap every bone in his body. “You drugged me.”

“You have memories of this?” Hannibal looks surprised, if not a pinch pleased.

Will pauses.

He cannot tell Hannibal everything. Cannot voice his darkest suspicion.

Hannibal's manipulations were bad enough.

Will's reactions were worse.

“You were inducing the seizures. Creating time loss. Trying to convince me that I was....”

Will closes his eyes, sees himself on the couch, begging for it.

“....something I am not.”

Hannibal grins at this, a slow unfurling of teeth.

“One's sense of self is strongest when one sees a negative.” Hannibal chuckles softly and looks towards the couch. “What identity have you seen me whisper in your ear that gives such sudden strength to your concept of self?”

Will swallows harshly.

“I am not a killer.”

“You sent someone to kill me.” Hannibal smiles wider, as if the gesture had been charming. “My body is marked with the scars of your vengeance, stamped by your wrath.”

“There are a myriad of reasons to kill.” Will shakes his head, looking up. “My retribution was purposeful. My intent pardoned by your betrayal.”

“If intent and prior circumstance color our actions, then I have always been without blame.” Hannibal glances over, eyes twinkling like jet. “Both in my life and my intentions towards you.”

Will stiffens, crossing his legs and clenching his fist.

“Your *intentions* towards me, Doctor Lector?”

Hannibal turns back towards Will, smiling darkly.

“Your broken mirror may reflect many things in the shadows, Will.” Hannibal leans forward, eyes hooded in the gloom of the office. “But my design towards you has always been one of liberation, not despair.”

“You would liberate me from righteousness.” Will hisses. “From normalcy, reputation, and companionship.”

“You dwell in the halls of the depraved.” Hannibal tilts his head to the side, as if the notion amuses him. “Righteousness, normalcy, and reputation have always been on the other side of the looking glass.”

“And companionship?” Will falters, unwilling to imagine Hannibal behind him, whispering Italian as he traces patterns into his bare skin.

Hannibal pinning Will, lips hovering above his own as Hannibal slowly chokes him, slowly strokes him.

Hannibal, lips on his cock, consuming him inch by inch.

“Companionship.” Hannibal smiles, splitting his face into shadows and gleaming teeth. “Companionship is a gift you have already been given.”

~~~~~

Jack drives out to Will's house the next morning to retrieve him. Will fumbles his apology and cites water damage on his phone missing his calls - his cell slipped on the porch while bathing his dogs.

Jack gives him a look and forces him in the car.

There has been another body, in Maryland again. Fifteen minutes from Wilst Creek. They drive all morning.

They find the man in a bed of daffodils by a willow tree. His body resting on his back, eyes closed, arms crossed over his heart amidst a circle of yellow blossoms that fan out like a sunburst.

The body was wrapped in white silk, a pattern of white doves in flight woven into the fabric. The silk was opened in a provocative V down to his navel, forming a path of bare skin for his hands to rest against. His skin is stark white except for the blooms of red bruises dusting his throat and his swollen hands. Hands covered in black and grey.

Hands tattooed a thousand times over with a single word in Hebrew.

Jack comes to stand beside Will, frowning like the headmaster surveying the graffiti of delinquents.

“It says David.” Price remarks, still photographing the body. “The name is tattooed over seventy times, seven on each finger.”

“The number of times Christ commanded that we are to forgive the brother who sins against us.” Hannibal comes to stand beside Will, his breath coming out in white wisps in the cold.

“David is a biblical name.” Will tries to ignore the sudden tension at Hannibal's presence. Muscles turned tight, burning and twisting along his stomach.

Hannibal turns to Will and smiles, eyes crinkling.

“Hebrew does not have any vowels in its alphabet.” Hannibal speaks as it is just the two of them in the snow. “The consonants that form the word Beloved and the name David are the same.”

Hannibal mouths the word *beloved* in a breathy whisper that is almost lewd.

Will feels the blood pool to his groin on instinct and is overtaken with nausea.

Crawford grunts, not seeming to notice Hannibal's rakish smile or Will's discomfort.

“You said our killer knew the last woman, Will. Knew her and loved her. But she was untouched.” Crawford clears his throat and motioned towards the corpse. “He is not.”

Will feels his breath catch, the air suddenly too cold to inhale.

“How?”

Images of Hannibal stroking him in the office rise unbidden, his body limp and pliant, his mind on fire.

“He penetrated him.” Crawford crossed his arms stiffly, “Post-Mortem.”

Will feels dizzy, shaking his head rapidly to block whatever lurked in the shadows of his memory.

Focus.

“Alright,” Price drops the camera and stands, dusting the snow off his pants as he moves away from the body, “he's all yours Will.”

Will looks up startled as everyone stares expectantly.

He doesn't think he can look.

And the pendulum is suddenly there, blinding and yellow, humming as it erases Zeller, Jack, and all the others.

Everyone except Hannibal.

And Hannibal stands there, looming over Will, parting the white silk from his skin. Longing radiating off him in waves, washing over Will like warm water. And Will realizes he isn't the killer.

He is the corpse.

The corpse, lying amidst the bright yellow daffodils like Icarus thrown into the flames of the burning sun. He feels Hannibal's hunger, feels Hannibal's longing lance through his body like a solar flare, like molten fire and blinding light.

“Beloved,” Hannibal croons, hand trailing reverently over Will's hand, held to his cold breast.

The other hand grasps Will's hand to Hannibal's heart, beating with a savage fury.

“You chose her.” Hannibal intones, his voice warped with bitterness. “But now she will guide your way.”

Hannibal spreads Will's thighs, hitching his legs up over his shoulders.

“Guide you to me.” And he inside Will, and the world blooms white and yellow behind Will's eyes and he is *so full*. And he cannot distinguish their bodies anymore, their separate temples of flesh and flowers, as pleasure blooms deep within Hannibal, deep within Will.

“*Desiderio delle tue mani chiare.*” Hannibal leans forward, sucking red blossoms across Will's pale sternum. And Will's body contorts with it, and he is no longer a corpse but a willing partner pushing up to meet Hannibal's savage pumping. Opening to him like a flower, yellow as the ripened fruit, yellow as the mane of the lion that rides him.

And it's too much to bear. Too much to hold.

“*Follia d'amore*” Hannibal whispers against Will's skin, punctuating the Italian with every thrust. “*L'amore della mia vita.*”

It's everything he ever wanted. Blooming in a rush of color and sound. Building inside his chest.

Growing in the garden of his heart.

“What did you see, Will?” Crawford's voice breaks in, voice tolling out damnation.

Will stumbles backwards, suddenly in the present, ashamed and painfully hard.

“Yes,” dream Hannibal purrs, looking up from where he is fucking corpse Will in the flowers, a pale bud plucked open and wanton, shimmering like a mirage. “What do you see?”

And real Hannibal's hand is on Will's shoulder, and he standing behind him smiling, smiling the serpent's grin.

And Will could swear he hears Hannibal whisper, too low for Jack or anyone to register, hears him whisper darkly before Will lost his stomach to shame and arousal in the grass.

Hurling vomit and his pride, desire and betrayal.

He swore he heard him whisper in the frost. In the garden of the dead.

Beloved.

~~~

Translation of Hannibal's Endearments:

*il mio falchetto* ~ my fierce little falcon

*Cedi, cedi a me, cedi, cedi all'amor.* ~ Yield, yield to me, yield to love.

*Desiderio delle tue mani chiare.* ~ *Desire of your hands bright*

*Follia d'amore. L'amore della mia vita.* ~ *Madness of Love. Love of my life.*

## Chapter End Notes

Shout out to itsbeautiful for listening to me panic and whine over my writing and always being so patient. Also a big thanks to my new beta Gwilbers for editing this. Without her help you guys would have been reading a hot mess of grammar fails!

Christmas Holiday is going to be really hectic for me so I probably won't be able to update again until the beginning of Jan. Chapter 3 is coming though. After that I will try to update around every other week.

If you are enjoying things please Please PLEASE comment! Feedback means the world to me and I get so inspired by your comments. Fanfiction is such a community thing, I LOVE hearing from you!

Finally if you want to shoot the breeze online, ask questions, or read snippets of chapters as I write them I am <http://lovelylaceandlilac.tumblr.com/> on tumblr. My ask box is always open and I love meeting new fannibals!



# et l'arco, et le saette ond'i' fui punto

## Chapter Summary

What if swallowing Abigail's ear wasn't the only memory Hannibal buried?

---

“You hope to entice me with a coiffured hair and a pressed shirt.” Hannibal's voice is a sibilant sigh, the echo of a serpent in the garden long ago. “But the niceties of Man pale before the passions of Nature.”

Will shudders as the doctor's fingers ghost down his neck.

“Remember, mon précieux,” Hannibal intones darkly, “that when an wolf seeks to seduce they offer their throat.”

## Chapter Notes

Benedetto il primo dolce affanno  
ch'i' ebbi ad esser con Amor congiunto,  
et l'arco, et le saette ond'i' fui punto,

Blessed be the first sweet suffering  
that I felt in being conjoined with Love,  
and the bow, and the shafts with which I was pierced,

~ PETRARCA

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Chapter 3

Lucia struggled onstage against her brother Enrico's embrace. He demanded she marry Arturo and had intercepted all letters from her lover Edgardo.

Her face was pale, her voice strangled with grief. Her brother, her closest confidant and last remaining relative had betrayed her, and her isolation cuts deep.

*il mio strazio, il mio dolore.  
Perdonare ti possa Iddio  
l'inumano tuo rigor,  
perdonar ti possa Iddio,*

“For my grief and anguish. May God forgive you,” Hannibal whispered. “For your inhuman cruelty, may God forgive you.”

Enrico reprimanded his sister gently.

*A ragion me fe' spietato  
quel che t'arse indegno affetto;  
ma si taccia del passato*

“ I was made justly harsh by your unworthy passion,” Hannibal chuckled, “but enough of the past”

Will turned his head on Hannibal's shoulder towards the stage, the room spinning red and black. The gas lights and faces of the audience blur and wheel like some nightmarish circus.

Enrico raised his arms in a sweeping gesture and grabbed Lucia. His voice was liquid honey as he sang, his persuasion thick in the air.

*Spenta è l'ira nel mio petto,  
spegni tu l'insano amor,*

“ I have cooled my anger,” Hannibal whispered, “n ow cool your insane love.”

*Ah!...Il core mio balzò!*

*Ah!...Il core mio balzò!*

*Ah!...Il core mio balzò!*

“ What is she repeating?” Will slurred, gazing up from Hannibal's shoulder.

“She is mourning how easily she is lead astray by the man she longs to trust.” Hannibal murmured, gazing down at Will in the gloom. “Ah, she exclaims, how my heart falters.”

~~~

Alana entered the visitation cell after the Bailiff's murder with the look of a grieving widow. Will could not help but wonder if she grieved after what he had lost or what she had failed to see more. Alana was practical enough to turn down his instability. The uglier Will's psyche got the more he feared how deep her pragmatism went.

Alana forced a smile and sat opposite Will, fresh scrubbed normalcy in a brightly patterned dress. Will ached for everything he could not be.

He reached for her hand anyway.

“Chilton tells me you are adjusting well.” Alana reached for Will's outstretched hand and smiled her approval.

Will felt as if he has been slapped.

“Some find the banality of routine maddening. Having everything plotted and out of your control.” Alana continued, misreading Will's shock. “But I can understand how after losing your fundamental grip on reality....being absolved of responsibility would be a blessing.”

Will shifted uncomfortably at the other side of the visiting cell table, withdrawing his hands as far as the handcuffs would allow. The thought that he would thrive in prison, that having everything stripped from him might be good for him.....it sounded too much like this was where he belonged.

“I have a clear grip on reality now.” Will inhaled painfully. “It is everyone around me who remains blind.”

“Hannibal is not-” Alana started.

“Hannibal *is* .” Will hissed, feeling that deep well of anger churn. “He was and is and will always be the killer you are looking for.”

“The Bailiff's death only proves there is a killer out there inspired by your,” Alana paused, her tone switching to something more clinical, “mental break.”

“Yes I broke....I outright shattered.” Will felt familiar anger; an anger that everyone was still so eager to believe him capable of such darkness. Even Alana. Especially Alana. “But I never killed those people.”

“I was hoping the verdict would have helped focus your mind to get better. Make what happened to you less terrifying and confusing.” Alana looked down and frowned. “I can't exactly blame your lawyer.”

Will looked away. "Faith in legal justice has never been any more comforting than a nightlight."

The silence weighed between them, heavy and pregnant with a romance never carried to term.

"I walked out of that courtroom, and I could hear my blood, like a hollow drumming of wings. And I had the absurd feeling that whoever this killer is, he walked out of that courtroom with me." Will frowned, "He's going to reach out to me."

"What does he want?" Alana pursed her lips, managing to sound both skeptical and disapproving.

Will could only give a twisted carcass of a smile. Whoever killed the bailiff was just like Hannibal in one regard.

"He wants to know me."

Will paused, staring at Alana as if she was a new creature before him.

"What do *you* want?"

Alana looked infinitely sad, like the icon of the Virgin painted upon a Cathedral wall.

"I want to save you."

Will felt her pity like acid and pitied her in turn. He should not blame her for her blindness, her inability to see Hannibal amidst the bloody specters in the crowd. He was the one cursed to empathize with the damned.

He blamed her anyhow.

~~~~

Will met with Abigail at her group home. They took a stroll on the garden, the autumn leaves crunching beneath their boots like so many crushed beetles. It was twilight, and the last rays of the day cast purple and orange hues on the flagstones. The garden was empty with the first trace of winter frost.

Garret Jacob Hobbs walked with them, pale and rotting two steps behind in Will's periphery.

Abigail was so small amidst the crab apple trees, dark and pale like a tiny wren, the knotted scarf hiding the bright red scar across her throat. A token of her father's brutal love.

Will wished his feelings for her were just the desire to protect. To shelter a broken bird.

Not the emotional imprint of a killer.

“He fed them to us.” Abigail mused, her voice flat as she plucked a crab apple from the ground and aimed it at the wall. It connected with a sickening splatter. “And I knew the taste. Liked it even.”

Will wanted to feel horror, should feel disgust at this admission. Every day Abigail shows herself to be less innocent, less something needing Will's protection.

Instead he felt pride. Felt pride as Garret Jacob Hobbs stands next to him, ghastly and pale, grinning at his daughter with delight.

Their daughter, by death and despair.

“They weren't me.” Abigail played with a strand of her hair and looked ahead. “They tasted like survival.”

“You were put in a position where you were helpless.” Will reassured, wondering if he was trying to placate himself or her. “You did what you had to in order to get through.”

Abigail regarded him with an inscrutable expression, hair haloed by the latticework of dead vines and frost on the garden wall.

“But we shouldn't savor it.” Her tone was dry, as if she was admonishing herself only in jest.

“He was your father Abigail.” Will pushed his glasses up and averts his eyes. He felt feverish and sick. He needed an aspirin. “Your feelings towards what he did will always be colored by your love as a daughter. You were never a willing participant. You never had an objective choice.”

“You think I never would have helped a killer if I wasn't the killer's daughter.” Abigail cocked her head to the side, regarding him like a hawk.

“No.” Will swallowed, feeling a lump lodge in his throat. “You think you would?”

Abigail slowly unknotted her scarf, running her fingers over the puckered flesh of the scar.

“I think there is darkness waiting for us at every corner.” Abigail turned towards Will, her face in that moment terrifyingly older. “But whether we respond is by the nature of our own reflection, not someone else's hand.”

Will stopped, suddenly unable to breathe in the dying light.

“Abigail...”

Her head was back lit by the setting sun, her hair on fire with terrible illumination around her. She glowed like a fallen angel, and Will could not stand to look upon her face.

“You cannot fear my shadows.” Abigail smiled warily, blood pouring from her neck, as she took his hand. “I do not question yours.”

~~~~

Will feels the eyes of the FBI, watching him through the slick glass walls of the Quantico lab. Their figures distort and expand as they walk by. Will rather wonders if this is how the world looks from within the fish bowl, a myriad of faces and looming reflections swirling past.

Zeller and Price are fanning around the autopsy table, the male corpse from Wilst Creek laid out under a bed of wilting yellow daffodils.

Price is droning on about the ink composition of the tattoos while waving a test-tube in Will's direction.

Will can't hear him.

Hannibal's face suddenly shimmers in the glass wall, all narrowed eyes and sharp cheekbones, his reflection grows larger and larger like some garish funhouse mirror until he looms over Will like the giant head in the Wizard of Oz, backlit and terrible.

The reflection shifts and Hannibal opens the door and steps in the lab, all politeness and plaid, his footsteps echoing in Will's ear's like thunder.

Echoing in sync with the frantic beat of Will's heart.

“Oh perfect, the artist is here!” Zeller exclaims.

“Know anything about tattoo's doctor?” Price sounds more skeptical. “Because the victim's tattoos here have maximum creep factor. It looks like was his own name, David, the killer tattooed into the victim's body seventy seven times.”

Hannibal moves slowly around the table to stand by Will. Will can feel Hannibal steal the oxygen from the room, can feel the air turn thin and shallow as he struggles to breath.

Struggles not to feel.

“I'm afraid tattoos lay outside of the realm of my expertise.” Hannibal's eyes crinkle as he turns to Will. “Although I can appreciate the aesthetics of wanting to carve yourself into the skin of your lover.”

Will feels his stomach drop. The fishbowl spins, all glass and white lights.

“Nathan Cambell was not the killer's lover.” Will snaps. “He was his victim.”

Hannibal regard's Will, his voice cloying.

“Our killer viewed him as a lover, *longed* for him, and consummated that longing after death.” Hannibal smiles sharply, his palm raised up in a deceptively placating gesture. “Love has many victims, not all of them willing.”

Will closes his eyes, something hot and tight lancing through his chest.

The yellow pendulum swings even as Zeller's voice drifts through.

“Will left out the best part.” Zeller snorts. “Rebecca Hamilton, the original girl we found with the base of her spine cut out, was Nathan Cambell's best friend. And the ground ash from her vertebra - ” Zeller shakes the test tube again for emphasis “was mixed in the ink used to tattoo Nathan here.”

Will can see yellow daffodils, petals enveloping him in swirls of yellow flames. And Hannibal is laying his corpse down, is carving his name into Will's skin over and over again.

Beloved.

“The killer tattooed his name into Nathan's flesh with the ashes from his best friend.” Price's voice sounds far away, as if through deep waters. “That is some dark obsession.”

“Ashes to Ashes.” Dream Hannibal whispers reverently. “And dust to dust.”

And Hannibal has cracked open Will's body, is thrust in him as he bites down. Embedded deep within him, his name on his skin, his teeth over his heart.

“There will be only me.”

Will opens his eyes to escape the vision. His heart pounds and his periphery blurs.

“The Dayak tribes of Borneo thought their hand tattoos would illuminate the darkness in the afterlife as the soul searched for the river of the dead.” Hannibal holds a hand over his chest as if struck, his voice ringing out. “Maligang, the spirit of the river, would check for the tattoo, which earned the soul the right to cross.”

There is no escape – the shimmering mirage of Hannibal fucking his corpse amidst sunny flowers remains, transposed in the center of the lab.

“You chose her.” Dream Hannibal intones, his voice warped with bitterness. “But now she will guide your way.”

Hannibal has Will's thighs, parted the dead flesh, bruised them like petals pushed aside as he thrusts in.

“Guide you to me.” And he is inside Will, and the world blooms white and yellow behind Will's eyes and he is so full. “Where we shall finally be one.”

Will gasps and shakes his head as the vision clears, half hard and disoriented. He is grateful for the table between them as he stands taunt, his fist trembling.

To crush or caress, he does not know.

“Rebecca was Nathan's lover.” Will's rasps, his voice catching. “David ground her bones, ground her essence – *her soul* – and used it to brand his name in his unrequited love Nathan's skin. The only thing she was good for was a map, a map to guide Nathan to him in the afterlife. Where he could not refuse him as he did in life.”

“Os Sacrum.” Price snaps his fingers. “The holy bone!”

“Our killer will not kill again.” Will finishes. “The next life he takes will be his own.”

“We need to tell Jack before he leaves.” Zeller grabs Price's arm and drags him out the door, his voice eager. “He's got a manhunt over half of Virginia for this guy.”

Will watches the door close with dread, leaving him alone in the aquarium with the shark. The room is suddenly hot, the lights too bright.

He is still half aroused and Hannibal knows it.

“Such poetry in death.” Hannibal sighs and gazes heatedly at Will. “A beautiful design.”

Will feels his gaze, feels it deep in his skull, like a fishing lure in his eye. And as his cock twitches and his skin flushes in response he is overcome by the need to purge. To bleed this arousal out, to vomit until he is clean.

“The daffodil has been a symbol of unrequited love for ages.” Will clenches his fist until his nails bite into his palms, his voice sharp. “Our killer lusted from afar, and then took his desire by force.”

Hannibal steps forward, smiling.

“In Europe the daffodil is indicative of rebirth, new beginnings and eternal life.” Hannibal places a hand on Will's shoulder and plucks a wilted daffodil from the corpse's arm, twirling it thoughtfully as his fingers caress Will's back. “In loving by force he hoped to rebirth passion.”

Will moves his shoulder violently back as if bitten, snatching the flower and crushing it.

He is hard now, desperately hard at Hannibal's touch and he hates himself for it.

-i n loving by force-

Hates Hannibal for it.

“Pluck a flower and you kill it.” Will spits out, glaring at the doctor. “Nothing will grow.”

Hannibal smiles at this, teeth gleaming, eyes aglow.

“For the flower no.” His voice curls around Will in a slick caress. “But the plant when pruned will double the buds. A gardener must cut the rose for it to bloom, and it will flourish under his blade.”

Will shudders, his body warm and his stomach clenched.

“It is a symbiotic relationship,” Hannibal murmurs, “where the flower craves the knife.”

“I crave a knife, but not for a symbiotic relationship.” Will hisses, his eyes narrow and his voice tight.

Hannibal laughs, a low chuckle. He turns to go, walking to the door before looking back over his shoulders with the deadly satisfaction of a large cat.

“You have no idea what you crave.” Hannibal's eyes slowly trail the length of Will's body with relish. “You have only begun to bloom.

And he leaves Will.

Left him alone with the corpse and memories of his tainted touch, etched in his skin.

~~~~~

Alana and Will stood on his porch in the frost the day after his release, an ocean of resentment between them.

Chilton had not been framed yet. Will had not been absolved.

“More letters. Most are from reporters. The rest,” Alana pulled her mouth as if she had swallowed something sour, “fans.”

Will kicked his boots against the side of the house until they were free of frost and mud.

He didn't look up as he took the mail.

“I don't know why they still bother writing. I was acquitted.” Will shuffled uneasily through the stack of letters. “I didn't kill anyone.”

Alana looked off towards the horizon.

“Not successfully anyway.”

Will continued to stare at the mail. Unable to meet her face or the distance in her voice. The letters were tied together by a mocking red ribbon, as if he might find their fawning admiration a gift.

He walked to the edge of the porch and binned them. The trash can was full of mail, both bills and personal. Responsibilities Will could not stand to face.

Alana merely looked at him, her eyes cold and blue.

Will stood awkwardly by the cans, wondering if that was rude of him. Alana had brought them all the way from his former prison P.O. Box.

“Thank you for collecting my mail.” He offered in his best attempt at a conciliatory tone.

It sounded mocking.

Alana merely squinted at him, as if searching for the hint of a facade he forgot to wear.

“I’ve come for AppleSauce.” The lightness of her tone was at odds with the jut of her jaw.

Will adjusted his glasses, staring at the hem of Alana's coat.

“I see.” Will scratched the back of his head. “Yeah. You rescued him. I'm surprised you didn't take him before.”

Will could feel her bitterness, could feel it ache in his teeth like the irritation when Styrofoam rubs against Styrofoam.

“I didn't want to pick up anymore of your habits.”

Alana looked over Will once more, waiting, always waiting for him to slip. For some ugly monster to come teaming forth.

Will couldn't wait for her to leave.

Alana dug into her coat pocket, producing a purple leash lined with black paw prints.

“Just bring me the dog.” She held the leash between them, as if challenging him to try and step any closer.

He marveled that they were ever almost lovers.

~~~~

Resuming his teaching post once he was released from prison had seemed like a good idea in theory.

Teaching only happened twice a week and his audience was socially adept enough to not ask questions of the FBI's gifted but eccentric profiler. Will could memorize his lesson, recite his slides to the clock at the back of the class, and then spend the rest of the week holed up in his office amidst cold cases and forensic publications. Graduate students could cover grading and all social interaction and there were no fresh corpses anywhere in sight.

Practice turned out decidedly different than theory.

Will walked into an emotional minefield. Gone was the idle curiosity and boredom of a normal class. Will could feel their focus, feel the animal intensity of their gaze like a hawk watches a mouse.

It felt like court.

And Will could feel the panic build, could feel his heart crawl up his esophagus into his throat, frantically beating and blocking every breath. And as his pulse galloped in his ears like an encroaching army, he watched the clock, watched it tick across the room, watched as its numbers blurred and its face turn white like bone.

And he could feel their concern, building on his panic, screaming in on his silence. But Will couldn't move, couldn't speak as he slumped forward, staring at the smiling clock, struggling to breath.

It was a panic attack.

Jack saw it as a sign.

A sign that Will would be best suited for fieldwork directly under Jack's supervision. Guilt for his previous breakdown and voracious appetite to keep Will away from student's wagging tongues and the press's hungry ears no doubt.

Will saw it as a sign he couldn't handle anything anymore.

~~~~

It happened two days after the daffodil crime scene.

There had been a sudden heat wave after Thanksgiving, turning the light snow into sludge and mud. Snow clouds rolled in from the North, pregnant with sleet in the warm air.

Will had shot three fingers of whiskey and taken the dogs out for the night. Watched them bolt through the shadows and between the pines like dragonflies in the reed. It was raining sleet, icy water dripping from the sky in torrents of freezing grey.

Will trudges through the mud, trying to turn his coat collar up against the cold. It smells of wet earth and rotten leaves as sleet rains down, the ground alternating spongy and squelching.

He whistles sharply and the dogs come running back, pouring from the tree line like termites out of wood. They are splattered in mud and Will has to corral them on the porch, has to wash of their paws with the frigid hose before letting them inside by the fire.

He is soaked by the time he got inside. Frozen from the hose and sleet.

He shoots another two fingers of whiskey and strips, feeling heavy and waterlogged. He doesn't stop until he is naked, feeling his clothes peel off like a second skin.

Feeling the warmth of the flames crackle against his skin as he faced the fire, the cold draft of the house whispering behind his legs.

He isn't sure when he takes his cock in his fist, but he does.

He imagines Hannibal. Imagines the doctor whispering obscenities in his ear as he fingered a drugged version of him on the couch. He imagines the corpse, of Hannibal fucking him savagely in the daffodils.

He imagines Jack, Alana, the FBI and what they would say. Knowing he was standing there alone, jerking off to thoughts of his therapist molesting him in the dark.

He imagines Hannibal, what he would think, knowing Will was aroused by his abuse. Was fucking his hand to thoughts of a serial killer sodomizing him, brutalizing him like a corpse.

Will feels shame, feels self-loathing, anger and betrayal all well up in the frantic rhythm of his fist.

And when he orgasms, aching and gasping, spurting on the hardwood floor in front of the fireplace, he feels everything crystalize into a single urge.

He has to end it.

Will is a bundle of nerves as he approaches Hannibal's house.

He is missing the righteous calm he felt when he sent Matthew to kill Hannibal. Seeing Beverly's body had made his decision so clear at the time.

But sending someone else to end the doctor was different than approaching the man to end their relationship himself. And intermingled with fury and hurt are new feelings. Imprints of longing and shame, twisted reflections of desire.

Will has to end this, before it ends him.

He pauses outside the entrance to Hannibal's office. Knocks three times, and then stands back in the waiting room.

Hannibal opens the door, a congenial smile on his lips.

“I no longer think your therapy is in my best interest.” Will blurts, feeling the rush of adrenaline and panic.

Hannibal frowns darkly, his lips curled in a flash of displeasure. Just as quickly his face smooths over into something impassive, but Will still sees it. The glimpse of the serpent enraged.

Will stands there, fist clenched to hold his resolve.

“You came to me two weeks ago to resume your therapy.” Hannibal starts slowly, motioning for Will to enter. “What has brought on the sudden change?”

Will glances through the open door of the office, at the couch he has come to fantasize and fear, and falters.

“I had thought it was best to deal with my feelings for you directly.” Will tries to give a nonchalant shrug and stays planted in the waiting room. “We have dealt with them. I am done.”

“All the darkness you accuse me of, the trauma of your accusal, your time in Chilton's prison, all resolved in one week?” Hannibal smiles wryly. “My therapy has never been so effective.”

Will gives a nervous laugh. It feels shrill and reedy in his ears.

“Come in Will.” Hannibal motions in again, his voice the picture of congeniality. “Don't be rude. If you are truly past the pale then we may talk as friends again, no?”

“We are past nothing.” Will relents and walks in warily, refusing to take a seat. “I am under no illusions as to what you are, Hannibal.”

“As you have been fond of reminding me.” Hannibal remarks lightly, closing the door and slowly walking towards the window, forcing Will to step backwards or face him. “You believed yourself to be under no illusions when you pointed a gun at me in my kitchen. Yet the same evening you came to me to resume your therapy.”

He regards Will, smiling sharply.

“One can only wonder what vision of me you currently harbor to break off therapy.” Hannibal's hand reaches down to slowly stroke the back of the couch.

Will swallows, the room suddenly too warm. He feels distracted and wonders if Hannibal did that motion deliberately to throw him off balance.

“I used to think better the devil you know.” Will starts, moving backward as Hannibal advances on him. “I no longer feel that way.”

“Yet I consider our friendship something *precious*,” Hannibal elongates the word precious into something intimate and lewd, his voice no longer congenial. Will feels his cock begin to stir and regards the door as he continues to step back, regretting his decision to enter.

“Your version of friendship got me shot and imprisoned.” Will hisses, feeling his back hit the wall next to the bookshelf in the corner. “You *framed me*.”

“The Chesapeake Ripper saw something in you Will. Something worth revealing himself, worth freeing you. He never left you to rot.” Hannibal looms over Will, regarding him in the corner with something Will fears to examine. “Do you not wonder why?”

Will remembers the couch, the bright yellow daffodils, his arousal at the crime scene, in the lab. He does not need to wonder.

“No. I wish to remove myself from your manipulations.” Will started forward, trying to push past Hannibal and leave. “Your games have left too many scars”

Hannibal reaches out as if to block Will's path, only to lift a teacup from the bookshelf, tracing the handle with fond fingers.

“Have you ever heard of *kintsugi* , Will?”

Hannibal gently places the teacup in Will's sweaty fist, brushing firm fingers over his palms, stopping Will in his tracks.

Will shakes his head, trying not to tremble at Hannibal's proximity, the insistent bloom of heat within his gut. The cup is a soft jade green, latticed over with tiny golden lines.

“It's a type of Japanese pottery, where the broken cup is repaired with gold in the lacquer and glue. It highlights the breakage of the vessel, a celebration of the transience and fragility of all things.”

Hannibal leans closer, his voice a dark whisper.

“Scars can be a thing of beauty.” Hannibal places his hand on Will's shoulder. *That* shoulder, the one Jack had shot. “Life's most brutal touches leave scars. The permanence of their brand an echo of the feelings that bore them.”

Hannibal's fingers are slowly tracing the bullet hole through Will's shirt.

Will struggles to swallow, to leave, to do anything but stand there frightened and aroused.

“Transforming scars into art,” he grips the teacup, half hoping it will shatter. “Assumes that audience will be aroused by the suggestion of violence.”

“Some find the sensual in flaying the flesh, in carving their name into the belly of the world,” Hannibal slowly smiles, lips curling back in delight. His hand reaches up to trace the length of Will's neck. “Others crave to be carved, to be stripped to the bone.”

Will feels his cock fully harden, Hannibal's fingers trailing down his neck, the other hand pressing, fingering the puckered flesh on his bullet hole through his shirt.

“You would gut me.” He is confused now, panicked, trying to think through the sudden heat of the room and thickness in the air. He had meant to hurl the accusation but it comes out broken, begging. “Carve me like a pig and eat me.”

“Most *precious* thing,” Hannibal's pupils have dilated wide, blown black at the boldness of the suggestion, “does the thought arouse you?”

Hannibal is close now, breath hot against his neck, and Will realizes too late he has been backed into the corner again.

"No." Will gasps. "I don't want to die."

Hannibal loosens his tie, gripping Will's hips and leans in, lips hovering over Will's ear in a brush of sin and heat.

"Only one of those statements was true." Will can feel Hannibal smile, can feel his lips curl and his teeth scrapes the shell of his ear. "I did not ask if you want to die, *mon précieux*, I asked if the thought of me *consuming* you *aroused* you."

Hannibal's words wash over Will like liquid sin and Will cannot separate himself from Hannibal, from the wave of desire he feels rolling off Hannibal like heat from the fire.

"No." Will cries, wishing he did not want this dark temptation, wishing he had never come into Hannibal's office.

"Layers and layers of lies, precious." Hannibal's hand moves swiftly, and suddenly his tie is off and around Will's wrists, pinning Will's hands behind his back.

Will struggles, feeling panic well up like black water from a pond. He is overwhelmed with feelings of vulnerability, and the thought of being taken here, stripped down and used by Hannibal again is both horrifying and intensely arousing.

"Il mio falchetto," Hannibal whispers, one hand holding Will's hands in a vice like grip, the other hand coming to palm the painful bulge in Will's pants. "My fierce little falcon, I know what darkness you desire."

Hannibal's lips descend on Will like a brand, burning away his senses and searing them together in fire and agony. And Will is drowning in it, feels his body boil and his blood thrum as desire washes through him, leaving him trembling and raw.

Will cannot distinguish what feelings are from Hannibal and what are his. He can only feel want, deep and carnal, threatening to tear him apart if he does not give in, does not release this pressure.

"Ask me darling boy. " Hannibal whispers sharply. "Plead for me to take you apart. I want to hear you *beg* for it."

And the command shoots through Will, lancing through his bones like an electricity. His knees want to buckle, his legs collapse, but Hannibal's hand holds him, tight and painful.

**" Beg for it. "**

And all the pressure thrums about Will. Bills and students, murders and police, social niceties and dishes, eye contact and noise, the clatter of people and the deafening roar of their emotions. The never ending cascade of needs to act normal, *normal* , and hold it together.

And Hannibal is gripping him, holding him, commanding he fall apart.

"Please," and Will can hear himself begging, can hear himself moaning. "I want you to *consume* me."

Hannibal hisses sharply, a sudden spike of pleasure radiating from him as he descends on Will's mouth again. Kissing him savagely, unrestrained, biting into Will's lip in a sudden flare of pain.

Will tastes the tang of copper amidst the heady drug of arousal, tastes his torn lip and Hannibal's dark desire. And Hannibal is sucking, sucking Will's lip and stripping him bare, buttons popping and falling to the floor like so many coins.

Will's fly is open and Hannibal's hand encloses around Will's cock in a sudden rush of pressure and heat. And Hannibal is still kissing him, sucking the gash in his lip in sharp bursts of pain as he milks Will with rapid flicks of the wrist.

Pain blooms into pleasure, and Will can hear himself moaning, hands tied behind his back, thrusting against Hannibal's hand like an animal in heat, baring his throat to be bitten.

Hannibal's desire is overwhelming, obliterating his senses with the pump of his fist, the pull of his teeth. And Will hears himself cry, feels his orgasm wash over him in a sharp shudder as the room bleeds black around him.

Will sinks to the floor shivering, clothing torn, feeling he just paid the piper in flesh and silver.

Hannibal rears back regarding his prey, lips smeared with Will's blood, eyes shining black.

"Gorgeous." Hannibal grasps Will's jaw and tilts his head up. "You look utterly debauched."

Will feels the sudden vulnerability of his position, splayed on the floor in the corner, his head level with Hannibal's crotch, caged by his body.

"Il mio falchetto," Hannibal crones, stroking Will's jaw. "You have given in willingly. Release yourself from burden of worry."

Hannibal's fingers find their way into Will's mouth, pressing, insistent.

"You will suck me now. You will swallow me willingly, hungrily precious." Hannibal's voice is unyielding. "You will not question whether you *should* do this thing."

Hannibal's fingers find themselves at the back of Will's throat and Will finds himself whimpering, both anticipating and fearing what is about to unfold.

“Your mind will empty, you will fill yourself only with me.” Hannibal's voice is hypnotic, washing away fear and doubt

" *M on précieux*, do you yield to me? " Hannibal presses his palms on the wall around Will's face, caging him with his body. "Do you yield to what I want?"

And Will longs to say yes, to wade back into the current of Hannibal's heady arousal, sink into the quiet of his dark waters.

“Say it precious.” Hannibal moves to grip Will's face again in a steel vice. “I will undo you, I will hurt you lovely thing, but only when you ask.”

And Will nods, shivering, as Hannibal baptizes him in sin and darkness.

“I want it.”

Hannibal smiles at this, a vision of cruelty, and releases Will's face to stroke his hair, his voice unbearably gentle.

“Then show me, beautiful boy, show me your acceptance.”

Will nods, reaching out with steady hands for Hannibal's fly, the world around him blurring as if it were a dream. Will can hear the stream, can feel the dark water and Hannibal's cruel smile beaming down upon him.

He takes Hannibal in his mouth, the man already flushed and hard, and feel's Hannibal's hands thread through his hair.

Hannibal is not gentle as he cradles his skull and fucks Will's mouth. His cock is thick and fills Will, pressing against the back of his throat. Will can feel the invasion, feel himself gagging and gasping as Hannibal pushes harder with each steady stroke.

“Swallow me darling boy,” Hannibal whispers fiercely, “swallow all of me.”

And Will is drooling, gagging, his eyes burning as he struggles to breathe. As he should feel hallowed out and used, his body fiercely grabbed and thoroughly fucked. Instead all he can feel is Hannibal, Hannibal's fierce hunger, his consuming lust and overwhelming desire for Will. How he must look, an agent of the FBI, wanton and on his knees, hands bound behind his back, flushed with Hannibal's pleasure, begging for Hannibal's abuse.

Will. Will. Will.

It's like a feedback loop gone awry and Will can feel himself harden again, harden with pleasure with every stroke as Hannibal angles downwards and fucks his throat, gagging and gasping and brimming with the savage pleasure Hannibal is extracting from his submission.

“*Cedi, cedi, cedi a me*.” Hannibal is chanting, eyes fierce, watching Will's eyes water as he thrusts into him with rapid strokes.

“*Follia d'amore*” Hannibal cries, thrusting into him as he growls in Italian. “*L'amore della mia vita.*”

As Hannibal cums Will can feel his orgasm with blinding clarity, feel his pleasure echo in Will's body as his own cock twitches heavy and ignored, throbbing as Will struggles to swallow Hannibal down without retching.

Will chokes and sputters, gasping in the aftermath. Trembling as the waves of Hannibal's orgasm wrack through leaving him light and dizzy, he is overwhelmed with the urge to cry. He feels empty, adrift, and suddenly terrified of what has just happened.

Hannibal crouches down, smoothing Will's hair and whispering in Italian.

“ *Il mio falchetto* ,” He murmurs, scooping Will up into his arms. “You tried to fly away, but I will never let you go.”

And as Will gazes up at Hannibal's open adoration, the office darkening in the gathering gloom, he feels how blatantly he has been manipulated.

~~~~

Enrico held Lucia firmly as she struggles, flailing in his arms like a dying swan, all frantic strength and dying grace.

Enrico's voice soared.

Giunge il tuo sposo.

“ Enrico sold his betrothed sister to another” Hannibal's voice was enthralled, his hand tightening around Will's knee. “He sings 'The bride groom is coming.'”

Will watched as Lucia's struggles grew weaker, her beating fists turned to soft flutters. She looked to the sky and sobbed aloud.

Un brivido mi corse per le vene!

“A shudder courses through my veins.” Hannibal murmured.

Enrico threw his arms wide in response, his voice soaring, commanding.

A te s'appresta il talamo.

“The marriage bed awaits you.” Hannibal's hand slid up Will's leg.

Enrico released Lucia as he turned to the audience and bellows. Will shivered and swayed, the theater a blur of red and shadows.

Lucia was weeping openly now, her voice arched up like a hollowed flute as she sang.

La tomba, la tomba a me s'appresta!

“ The tomb, the tomb awaits me! ” Hannibal's hand ghosted further up Will's thigh, hovering before resting on his hip.

Lucia collapsed to the ground, rose petals spiraled down from the rafters to pool around her. It looked like the petals were a bloody rain, pouring down from above. Will could see the shadows encroaching once more.

Will opened his mouth to cry out.

He could not make a sound.

Ahimè!

L'istante tremendo è giunto per me

Lucia slumped in the center of the stage, her voice spiraled softly as her fate became clear.

“Alas!” Hannibal whispered, “The terrible moment has come for me”

Will closed his eyes against the bloody rain, the spin of the room. Fire licked up his face and chest is swallowed in darkness.

“She fell for her brother's treachery?” Will intoned, sinking back into Hannibal's shoulder.

Hannibal is cool, solid and steady.

“A conflicted heart,” Hannibal smiled into Will's hair, stroking his back in a comforting gesture, “is easy to pull astray.”

~~~~

## Chapter End Notes

Hi Everyone! Thank you for being patient over the hectic Holidays! I hope this chapter is up to par. I have never written explicit scenes before and I was blushing like a damn teenager the whole time.

A BIG shout out to my beta Gwilbers - it was her idea to put the scenes from the past in the past tense to help distinguish the two and I think it really helped! She went through this entire chapter once it was already written and changed the verb tenses where necessary for ya'll so Kudos for her tireless efforts!

Also a massive shout out to my favorite artist, who I will just call R for the sake of her privacy and anonymity until I run this shout out by her. She has probably has never read this story and this type a fic might not even be her cup of tea, but it feels weird not to give her credit. Her Hannibal blog and artwork has been a HUGE source of inspiration for me. Every time I have writers block I just browse through her artwork and get so inspired I can't help but write. If I can capture 1/100th of the Hannigram passion she manages to convey I will have done something right. If there is anyone who has inadvertently inspired this strange fic, it's her. So thank you R, you inadvertently planted the seed and keep watering it all the time.

If you are enjoying things please Please PLEASE comment! Feedback means the world to me and I get so inspired by your comments. I LOVE hearing from you! Seriously every time I get comments I ride the writing high for weeks and I get so hyped I can't wait to write more.

Finally if you want to shoot the breeze online, ask questions, or read snippets of chapters as I write them I am <http://lovelylaceandlilac.tumblr.com/> on tumblr. My ask box is always open and I love meeting new fannibals! I am dead serious - I love talking to people. Unlike Hannibal I don't bite hahahaha.

# et le piaghe che 'nfin al cor mi vanno

## Chapter Summary

What if swallowing Abigail's ear wasn't the only memory Hannibal buried?

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“You hope to entice me with a coiffured hair and a pressed shirt.” Hannibal's voice is a sibilant sigh, the echo of a serpent in the garden long ago. “But the niceties of Man pale before the passions of Nature.”

Will shudders as the doctor's fingers ghost down his neck.

“Remember, mon précieux,” Hannibal intones darkly, “that when an wolf seeks to seduce they offer their throat.”

## Chapter Notes

Et benedetto il primo dolce affanno  
ch'i' ebbi ad esser con Amor congiunto,  
et l'arco, et le saette ond'i' fui punto,  
et le piaghe che 'nfin al cor mi vanno.

And blessed be the first sweet suffering  
that I felt in being conjoined with Love,  
and the bow, and the shafts with which I was pierced,  
and the wounds that run to the depths of my heart.  
~ PETRARCA

-----

A huge shout out to my beta Gwilbers. Did you guys know my grammar is appalling and I use commas like a three year old with sprinkles? No, you would have never guessed because I have an awesome beta who tirelessly reads over all this stuff and fixes it for you guys. Plus she gives me awesome ideas and tells me when my plot sounds cray cray. So here's to Gwilbers – she keeps this thing readable!

## **Chapter 4**

The cold is like a living thing seeking entrance to Will's body, it rakes its nails against his skin and burns his nose and throat.

Will is used to ignoring intruders.

Jack is not.

He crouches across the hole cut in the ice with a look of blatant disapproval, exhaling loudly and often.

Will doesn't know what to say. He is still learning how to converse in vagaries, the dance of double meanings and the quietly unspoken.

The phone had rung that morning, days since Mariam shot Chilton. Jack's voice slow and deliberate.

“You once said if you catch a fish once and it gets away, it's a lot harder to catch a second time.”

Will had paused, his heart hammering as he held the phone. He had said that to Jack before in reference to Hannibal; said it in the cabin where they found Mariam.

“You want to go fishing Jack?”

“Only for the most difficult fish.” Jack responded, his voice grave.

Now they sat on either side of the ice in the middle of the frozen river. Will had been uncertain of Jack's true meaning. He took him fishing as an out. But Jack's disinterest in anything but the theoretical broadcast his true intentions.

“How do you catch a fish that isn't hungry?” Jack asks, his voice serious.

“You change your tactics. Use live bait that moves and excites them to action. You gotta make him bite, even though he's not hungry.”

Jack stares at Will, his voice measured. “So what excites the one cautious trout that continuously eludes capture? What does he hunger for, when he ignores all other bait?”

Will looks down. It is suddenly difficult to breathe in the icy air.

*"Ask me precious thing. " Hannibal whispered sharply. "Plead for me to take you apart. I want to hear you **beg** for it."*

“Distress.” Will chokes out.

“It makes him act on instinct. He's always a predator.” Jack grins, eyes alight. “But it cannot be any bait. It must be bait worth risking capture for. Will, what do we risk our lives for?”

*“Follia d'amore” Hannibal cried, thrusting into him as he growled in Italian. “L'amore della mia vita.”*

Will does not speak Italian, but he knows the word *amore*.

“Our deepest desire.” Will cannot look at Jack. Is grateful for the cold, for the scarlet frost on his face that now disguises his shame.

“And how do you make a reality where only you and the fish exist?” Jack presses on, his eyes unyielding. “Where your lure is the only thing he wants, despite everything he knows?”

*“Il mio falchetto,” Hannibal murmured, scooping Will up into his arms. “You tried to fly away, but I will never let you go.”*

“Jack,” Will stammers, looking at the hole in the ice. “I don’t....”

“You hook him, Will.” Jack promises, eyes burning. “And I’ll catch him.”

~~~~~

Will cooks in his kitchen to hold onto his anger.

To remind him of the man he seeks to hate.

The feeling of betrayal, broken trust, prison – it all still sits like an open ulcer. Acidic and painful, a constant reminder of the bitterness he now holds. But there is something else now.

Something too tender to examine.

The dogs mill about the kitchen aimlessly as he fries sausage. Jack left earlier around lunch. The trout they caught sit in a bucket in Will’s fridge, ready for Hannibal that night.

“A peace offering.” Jack had smiled.

Will is relieved Jack didn't perceive what he would really be offering.

The sausage begins to sizzle, its charred flesh popping open in the cast iron pan. Will stabs it bitterly with a fork, tossing the bread in to soak up the fat.

He shouldn't enjoy what is coming. Shouldn't be considering it in the first place. It is fucked up to crave this.

But he does.

~~~~~

Will's father couldn't keep a job when he was a boy.

They moved around from town to town in Louisiana. His father searching for a glimpse of the woman who had left him in odd construction jobs and the bottom of a whisky bottle.

When Will was seven they moved to Grosse Tête. The town was small and poor like the rest, only seven hundred people with too much gossip and not enough money. The mosquitos still bit and Will's father still drank.

Will only remembered Grosse Tête for a lone purple and yellow truck stop off Highway 10. His father had pulled off to the nearest pump and was muttering about the price of gas.

Caged, across the parking lot in a small enclosure, was a live Bengal Tiger.

Bright orange and black, it lay listlessly on a grass lawn next to a palm plant and a large garish blue ball.

Will had opened the passenger door and wandered across the parking lot in a daze, pressing against the chain link fence that kept him from getting too close to the tiger's bars.

He had never been to the zoo. Had never seen a tiger outside of the worn pictures inside the dog eared classroom encyclopedias at school. Pages that the middle school boys had scrawled *big pussy* in permanent marker in the margins.

Will's father had approached him from behind, placing a warm hand on his shoulder.

"Tacky." His father had muttered. "Keeping a wild animal like this on the side of the road for tourists."

Will watched the tiger's tongue loll out listlessly in the heat. "How did they catch it?"

"These folk wouldn't know how to catch a tiger." His father laughed, a dry wheezing sound from too many cigarettes. "It was probably born in captivity. God only knows where the bastards bought it. Their roughest job now is keeping it fed."

"How do you feed a tiger?"

Will allowed himself to be led away from the chain link fence and back to the truck.

"Carefully." His father had grinned. "And not with your hands."

~~~~~

Will arrives armed with gel in his hair and the only button up shirt he owns that isn't flannel. He had shaved carefully earlier, minding the stray hairs and fine lines of his face.

If he was objective he would say he looked more youthful like this, suave and self-assured.

Will doesn't feel it.

He remembers the sausage in the skillet, overly charred, little chunks of blackened meat, like burnt fingers cut at the joint. Remembers Hannibal's dinner table, a warm smile and ghosts on every plate.

He promised Hannibal a reckoning.

Will knocks.

Hannibal opens the door to his office, allowing surprise and pleasure to color his face. The walls are red behind him, an open mouth arching at the door, the jaws of hell.

“Hello Will.”

Will turns, allowing himself a self-assured smile.

“An offering.” He holds out the sealed picnic cooler, careful not to let the water, where the fish sit, slosh.

“Gifts are given among both friends and lovers.” Hannibal quirks an eyebrow and holds the door open.

“We are neither.” Will grimaces at the word *lovers*.

“We use language to delineate the relationships around us. To give them meaning and context.” Hannibal circles round to the desk to put the cooler down and retrieve his wine glass, “What word would you chose to assign us?”

“Complicated.” Will smiles, something open and jagged.

“And yet you are here with an offering.”

“I have to deal with you.” Will tilts his head, trying to gaze through his lashes in the coquettish motion he has seen so many girls do. “And my *feelings* about you”

“First you have to grieve for what is lost.” Hannibal merely sniffs his wine glass. “And what has changed.”

Will walks forward, bridging the gap between them.

“I’ve changed. You changed me.”

Hannibal smiles at this, a possessive look that sends shivers down Will's spine.

“Change is inevitable. Nature stops for no man, and time's passage marks us all.”

“You *induced* change within me then.” Will sighs, reaching up to slowly trace the bullet hole in his shoulder. “And I am left with the scars.”

“Scars can be a thing of great beauty.” Hannibal narrows his eyes, watching Will touch his own shoulder.

“As you have told me.” Will swallows and reaches out, fingers trailing down Hannibal's sleeve “I am still learning your appreciation of aesthetics.”

Hannibal smiles at this and catches Will's hand before it can descend any further, leaving Will standing awkwardly, wondering what he did wrong.

“My cunning boy, your manipulations are grossly transparent.”

Hannibal reaches out, cupping Will's face.

“You hope to entice me with coiffured hair and a pressed shirt.” Hannibal's voice is a sibilant sigh, the echo of a serpent in the garden long ago. “But the niceties of Man pale before the passions of Nature.”

Will shudders as the doctor's fingers slowly ghost down his neck.

“Remember, *mon précieux*, ” Hannibal intones darkly, “that when a wolf seeks to seduce they offer their throat.”

“Do you consider me a wolf then?” Will meets his eyes then, both a threat and a promise.

“I consider you worthy,” Hannibal's smile unfolds, all sin and teeth. “And nothing is more dangerous.”

“I am not sure I want to be worthy of what you see in me.” Will straightens and hisses, not bothering to hide the anger from his voice now.

“And yet you are here.” Hannibal steps back, regarding Will sharply. “What were you hoping for, darling boy? That you would flutter your lashes and I, overcome, would ravish you senseless?”

Will feels his breath hitch.

Hannibal merely nods and takes a seat, gesturing to the other chair.

Will sits in turn, hoping Hannibal will let his question go unanswered.

The silence stretches out, long and endless as the night's sky.

Will gathers his courage, gathers his countenance and finally speaks, praying his voice will hold.

“I don't know what I wanted.”

“No.” Hannibal voice is assessing. “You hold the image of your desires in your mind's eye, sharp as the morning frost. You merely flinch at the act of asking.”

Will shudders.

“Maybe I don't believe it's good for me.”

“Would it reassure you to have some measure of control?”

“You would give me control?”

“I will offer you a choice to engage. A choice you have always had, and have been actively making.”

“Then you offer me the illusion of control.” Will clenches his fist. “If you believe I have been choosing to engage in my right mind.”

“Words have power. And you are choosing to engage now. You can voice the capacity to stop at any time.”

The unspoken implication of that phrase sends heat pooling in Will's groin.

Forbidden images flit through his head, a secret itch in the furtive dark. Will feels dizzy with the need to acknowledge the ache, something guarded and tender tucked deep inside.

“Are you offering me a safe-word?”

Hannibal smiles, canines sharp.

“If that is what you *desire*.”

Will closes his eyes. He does not want to think of what he desires. Does not dare voice it.

“How do I know you will honor it?”

“How do you know you can trust me?” Hannibal's voice lowers with gravitas. “I would give you my promise. And I always keep my word.”

“To break it would be rude.”

“I am nothing if not courteous.”

Will swallows.

Whatever his flimsy plan of seduction had been, it wasn't this. He never intended to negotiate exposing his belly to the wolf, to consider crawling in his jaws and praying for mercy.

“If I am to pick a word...” Will falters, terrified of voicing the pull inside him. “What are you offering?”

Will takes a shallow breath, the next question a whisper.

“What am I agreeing to?”

Hannibal slowly smiles, his eyes aglow.

“My darling boy,” Hannibal lilts, “*you already know.*”

The words rush over his head and fill his throat, like water, like drowning.

Will thinks of summers in Louisiana, of fishing for white crappie and catfish in the Toledo Bend. He remembers breaking into the reservoir as a teenager one night, and climbing to the top of the towering dam.

He had peered over the edge, stomach in his throat, and been overcome by the urge to jump into the inky blackness below.

To leave it all and plummet into darkness.

“L’appel du vide.” Will whispers, his French rusted by disuse.

“The call of the void.” Hannibal smiles in pleasure. “Hardly a single word, but quite apropos. Is your safe-word to be what you fear most, precious? Answering the call of the abyss?”

“Yes.” Will whispers.

“Death is the enemy,” Hannibal tilts his head, eyes gleaming, “but it is a different darkness that beckons you.”

“Are we discussing safe-words or my demons?” Will snaps, on edge.

“Are they not connected?” Hannibal smiles darkly. “You fear to indulge in the shadows of your soul, but would revel in my *ordering* you, my *violating* -”

“Don't say it.” Will hisses, cheeks burning.

“As you wish. You sit here, contemplating twilight's shadows, because you ache with a secret smelled but not yet tasted.” Hannibal stands and closes the distance between them. “You can absolve yourself of decision, of agency, of shame. I will give you your heart's desire. But first you must relinquish yourself to me.”

Hannibal looms above Will, eyes burning.

Will cannot breathe, cannot look away.

“Bare your throat, *mon précieux*” Hannibal's lips curl back, all teeth and shadows. “And I will *devour you whole*.”

Will stares up in Hannibal's eyes, black as the Toledo's waters. His heart hammers in his ears, his body tense with anticipation.

He longs to jump.

“Yes” He hears himself whisper, his voice faraway and tense. “Please.”

Hannibal's smile unfolds like the serpent in the garden. He leans down, breath ghosting across Will's lips.

Will feels his cock twitch, his chest unbearably tight. Saying those words, the release had almost been erotic.

“Do you know what you will do for me first, darling boy?”

Will hisses and lifts his head up, reaching out to pull Hannibal to him. His cock aches. The thought of willingly giving into this is dizzying.

Hannibal grabs Will's wrists and pins them to the chair, hands firm and controlled. His mouth is still hovering, just out of reach.

Will bites back a moan.

“You will *wait*.”

His eyes snap open.

Hannibal smiles, pressing a chaste kiss to Will's forehead.

“You are not to touch yourself, you are to ignore the *hunger* within you. I will feed you darling boy, but only when you are ready.”

Will squirms in Hannibal's grasp.

Hannibal would have him beg for his touch, and then deny him. Will clamps down the part of his breast that surges at the prospect of being forcibly withheld.

“I am ready.” He writhes and juts out his chin, arching his throat up in offering.

Hannibal laughs, releasing Will's wrists and patting his hand.

“You have submitted in words only. You wish to lose yourself in the flesh, to give only your body. But I will savor all of you, darling boy.” Hannibal stands, pulling Will up with him. “I would have your company first. Stay for dinner.”

Will tenses.

Hannibal allows a ghost of a smile.

“You already brought the meat.”

~~~~~

Brain Pascal asked Will to hang out with Chuck and Big Bobby on a muggy Saturday when he was ten.

They were going to steal Cokes at the Piggly Wiggly and then go fishing on the Whiskey Chitto. The store's manager, Chris Mason, despised Brian ever since he saw him flirting with his older daughter Elle. Will had been invited solely so he could distract Mason.

He was the bait.

Strange and shy, Will had never been invited anywhere by his peers. Especially not by the older boys.

He would take it.

*Will has to distract Strictlace Mason* they murmured as they pushed Will towards the Piggly Wiggly, the bright linoleum and smell of lemon Pledge assaulted Will's senses. *You have to keep him occupied and then we can go fishing* they cajoled as Will stepped inside the glass doors.

It felt too fresh and clean for Will, a poor motherless boy whose dad shopped at Jr. Food Mart down the road. Everything was shiny and white, and Will remembered the hospital, remembered the nurse examining the arm he had burned against the radiator when was trying to clean the apartment by himself.

The boys laughed as they ran behind Will, scattering towards Elle's register.

Will walked through the aisles in a daze, brightly colored packaging of all the food he had never tried wrapped up like Christmas presents.

He found Mr. Mason restocking the aisles. Bent over the shelf, his hair a riot of salt and pepper, his face a deep grove of frown lines.

Will faltered, closed his eyes and pictured drinking Cokes on the bank of the Whiskey Chitto with the boys, laughing in the dappled sunlight as he cast out his lure.

He could taste the cola, could taste his loneliness being washed away down the gurgling creek.

“Mr. Mason?” Will started, and had no idea what to say, no idea how to do what the boys wanted of him.

Chris Mason looked down at Will, skinny and unkempt in fraying jeans, and Will could feel his pity sucking him down like the mud on the creek bank.

“You’re Lee’s kid, right?” Mason’s eyes tried to be kind, but the way he said his father’s name sounded so sad.

“Yeah.” Will wondered if Mason could see his sweat as it trickled down his neck and arms.

“You here to pick up something for your Pop?” Mason gave a long suffering sigh when Will nodded in affirmation. “I can’t sell beer to a minor, boy.”

And Will stiffened, felt his breath catch and tears prickle his eyes. Because his father was a *good man*, a good man with strong hands and a quick smile, and Will could feel the condemnation closing in.

Will opened his mouth to protest, to call Mason a liar, to say *anything* when Elle's voice cried out.

And they turned to see Brian, Chuck, and Bobby running from the far register. Clutching cartons of cigarettes and tins of chewing tobacco along with three Cokes. Laughing as they ran, darting out the doors into the sunlight. The baggage boys tried to catch them, but they scattered in the parking lot like the marbles Will's aunt once brought him for Easter.

Scattering in the tree line, far, far away. Far from their pursuers and the boy lonely enough to listen.

Elle turned crying, freckles flushed and shining, and pointed at Will.

“They came in with *him*.”

And Will tried to run, run as fast as his scrawny legs would take him. Dodging Mr. Mason as he reached out and grabbed his shoulder, clutching his sleeve as it tore from the well worn seams. Will ran past the aisle straight into the butcher who had just left his counter at all the commotion and reached out to clutch Will with terrible bloody hands.

And Will remembered with horrible clarity, standing small and thin as Mr. Mason approached him seething with judgement, remembered fishing with his father.

Remembered that when the trout closes on the lure it swallows the bait whole.

~~~~~

Will watches Hannibal in the kitchen, all hard lines and controlled movements.

Watches him gut and clean and gill gut the fish, hollowing out their bodies.

“It is important to kill the fish without pain.” Hannibal intones as the dull edge of the knife comes down on a trout's head with a meaty thwack. “Adrenaline gets in the blood, rendering the flesh bitter.”

“Because you are the model of the ethical butcher.” Will remarks dryly.

“A gentle hand brings out the sweetness.” Hannibal walks behind Will with the trout, his breath ghosting down Will's neck as he looks over his shoulder.

Will is peeling the melon balls. He tries not to shiver.

“You have a deft hand with a knife.” Hannibal hums approval into Will's ear. “You may slice the cucumber next.”

“I may?” Will turns but Hannibal has already moved to the pan of vinegar.

Hannibal dips the trout in the vinegar and then lays them over the fish kettle for baking.

“Would you prefer I order you?”

Will feels his cock twitch and ducks his head. “No.”

Hannibal smiles.

“Truite au Bleu with fish consommé and a hollandaise sauce on the side.”

“Seems simple for you.” Will snorts as Hannibal places the last of the trout in the kettle. “Au Bleu? Blue trout?”

“Your French is coming back.” Hannibal hums approvingly, moving the salted octopus on a bed of purple watercress onto the counter. “The protective mucous on the scales of the fish turns sweet and blue when combined with the vinegar during cooking.”

Will starts slicing the cucumber. “Ah.”

“It is a beautiful dish, befitting of a beautiful guest.”

Will feels his neck burn. It shouldn't provoke such a response, such casual flattery.

Hannibal washes his hands and walks over to Will.

“I believe I will prepare it engastration.”

Will concentrates on slicing, pausing as he feels Hannibal's warm hands brush his.

“Like a Matryoshka doll, the trout will be eating itself. Its tail emerging out its mouth.” Hannibal guides Will's knife. “Cut thinner, for the vinegar to soak through.”

Will attempts to ignore the warmth spreading through his body at the deft touch, Hannibal's arms encircling his own.

The meaning of Hannibal's words slowly soak in.

“A cannibal dish.” Will whispers, stomach suddenly tight.

“You would accept only part of me. The cravings you find palatable.” Hannibal's hands slowly trail up Will's arms, leaving goosebumps in their wake. “I should endeavor that you understand more. You once tried so hard.”

“Back when I was blind. Before I knew who you were.” Will remembers those days, of innocence and friendship like an open wound. The memories are bitter now, the words more bitter still. “I tried to understand you to catch you.”

He grips the knife, imagines turning suddenly, slitting the doctor's throat.

“And you have, darling boy.” Hannibal murmurs in Will's ear. “Yet like a domesticated cat with his snare, you don't know what to do with me.”

“You are no one's prey.” Will closes his eyes. The image of Hannibal bleeding out on his kitchen floor bright in his mind.

“No.” Hannibal agrees. “And neither are you.”

~~~~~

The nicest house Will lived in as a child had mustard yellow appliances. It was a rental property and the kitchen had been retiled in the 70s to match. Ochre and orange covering every space, bright and garish against the dark brown cabinetry.

Will's father never cooked in the kitchen.

Everything was heated up in the microwave. Cans of corn beef hash, frozen dinners, spaghetti made with ketchup and beef patties. When he was younger they would eat in front of the television, Will's father with a beer and a five o'clock shadow. They would watch reruns of Barney Miller, the lines around his father's mouth deepening with unrestrained mirth.

Some nights his father wouldn't come home and Will would heat dinner himself. The electric can opener sat beside the microwave, the words *General Electric* in silver cursive on the base.

Will had to pull the kitchen chair over to the counter in order to reach.

Once Will's father was so incoherent in the morning he packed a stick of butter and a pack of cigarettes for Will's lunch. Will binned them at school.

The next morning Will crept into the kitchen before dawn and prepared his own lunch. Just baloney and mayo between two slices of Sara Lee bread.

His father was still asleep.

As the houses grew into apartments Will learned to cook. Basic things; fried baloney, catfish, fried cabbage, rice and gravy, and hush puppies. He learned without being told, no one to instruct or reprimand him. No one to praise his successes.

On Saturday mornings he would stand at the stove mixing corn meal, baking powder, salt and milk in a sauce pan until a crust would form. The *couche couche* would congeal in a single yellow lump, framed in the stark black expanse of the pan.

It looked like a small sun in the vast darkness of space.

Yellow and alone, its bright light swallowed by the void.

~~~~~

Hannibal changes into a charcoal plaid suit and a paisley tie for dinner.

“You don't have to you know.” Will cannot help but snort at Hannibal's preening as he seats himself. Something about his vanity, his ridiculous fussiness is familiar in a way that makes Will relax in spite of his seething rage, his festering wound.

“You are my guest.” Hannibal walks in the dining room with dinner, the Truite au Bleu arranged artfully on a platter. “You spent so much time assisting the meal's presentation. Should I not match your labor?”

Will glances at the misshapen melon balls he peeled nestled amidst baked duck eggs and brightly colored roe.

“My contributions look jacked.”

Hannibal spoons the trout into bowls, pouring the consommé on top. He unbuttons his jacket and sits.

“But they are appreciated nonetheless.”

“Is that your way of saying A-for-effort?”

“Mistakes in the kitchen hone valuable skills and are therefore almost always worthwhile.”

“You clearly haven't tasted my cooking.”

Hannibal looks up from his fork.

“I would like to.”

Will narrows his eyes.

“That wasn't an invitation.”

“Wasn't it?”

Will shifts in his seat. He remembers when Hannibal used to visit him in Wolf Trap, out of place amidst the dog hair and mismatched furniture. A steady presence, one of the only guests Will welcomed into his solitude.

It used to be so easy.

“I'm not sure.” He answers honestly.

Hannibal nods.

“Your emotions towards me snap back and forth like an elastic cord. Sentiment pulled taut, ready to fly upon release.”

Will laughs at this, a brittle disused sound.

“You mean how I can't decide whether I want to fuck you or kill you.”

“Language.” Hannibal reprimands sharply.

“Too crude for your table?”

Hannibal merely smooths his napkin down and cuts another bite of fish.

“Is that what you are picturing now?”

“Which one?”

“Either.”

Will watches Hannibal watch him as he lifts his fork to his mouth, watches him swallow slowly with relish. The apple of his throat bobbing in a long, lewd motion.

Heat pools in his groin.

“I wasn't before.”

“But you are now.”

Will shifts in his seat, the back of his neck warm.

“When?”

Hannibal lifts his wine glass and sips.

“When I decide.”

Will feels his cheeks color. He doesn't want to ask for it. Hates himself for even wanting it. That it will only happen on Hannibal's terms makes it easier.

“Yeah, okay.” Will nods.

“Are reconsidering the control you gave me?”

Will shakes his head.

“The opposite then.” Hannibal watches Will, his voice washing over Will's skin like warm bath water. “Are you aroused by not having a choice in the matter?”

The way Hannibal says it, voice authoritative and clipped.

Will feels his cock twitch.

“What if I asked you to strip now darling boy? To get on your hands and knees and suck me.”

Will drops his fork, feeling his cock harden and strain against his trousers.

“Are you?” He whispers, his hands moving down towards his lap.

“You are not to touch yourself, Will.” Hannibal's voice is sharp and disapproving.

Will clenches his fists and hisses, his erection now insistent and uncomfortable.

“You long to now, don't you darling boy?” Hannibal leans forward, eyes gleaming. “You want the release.”

Will's shoulders are drawn tight. It shouldn't be so hard, so hard to breathe.

Hannibal smiles indulgently.

“All in due time.”

Will wonders, wonders how hate and desire can exist within him in such equal measure.

~~~~~

Will helps Hannibal with the dishes afterwards. The plates are white ringed with flowering gold filigree – fine China too delicate for the commercial washer. Hannibal draws them out of the sudsy water one at a time, their white faces emerging from the surface like the moon on the horizon of the ocean.

Will knows the feeling. To be suspended in Hannibal's hands over dark waters, a terrible orbit he is compelled to follow.

Hannibal follows Will out, helping him into his coat in the foyer. The doctor's hands ghost over Will's arms and shoulders as Will stands there, allowing himself to be dressed. The touch is brief but warm. Will rather feels like a doll, Hannibal's hands arranging him and dressing him in a way he sees fit.

Will swallows at the unexpected tightness in his chest the thought provokes.

“Are you free Saturday evening in three weeks?” Hannibal asks the question as he fusses with the lapels of Will's coat, tucking the ratty wool scarf inside.

Will nods mutely, still hyper aware of the doctor's roaming hands.

“There is an opera I should think you would enjoy.” Hannibal steps back to admire his work, his arms still clasped around Will's shoulders. “The lead tenor, Roberto Alangna, is returning to France after this. To miss him would be a monumental waste.”

“Are you asking me on a date?” Will's voice is sardonic. He gazes at the man loosely holding him and frowns. Dinner and shagging at Hannibal's house were an expected part of his vague entrapment scheme, an *anticipated* part even, although Will is loath to acknowledge it.

Dates and public outings with Hannibal were not.

Then again it wasn't like anything was going remotely how Will had planned it. And a great deal could happen in three weeks.

“We have gone to the opera together before.” Hannibal responds, neatly ignoring Will's pointed question.

“That was *before*. Last year.” Will's eyes cloud at the memory. “Lucy something?”

“Lucia di Lammermoor.” Hannibal smiles, his hands still clasping Will's shoulders. “You enjoyed it.”

“I only remember bits and pieces.” Will frowns, the memory of the production is hazy and distorted, stopping abruptly at the intermission. He remembers a woman on stage, red and gold fleur-de-lis on the carpet, shivering violently in the bathroom and....

Will grits his teeth and side steps out of Hannibal's grasp. "I had a seizure that night, didn't I?"

"A very mild one. At the end of the evening." Hannibal nods casually, as if the trivial nature of the seizure forgives the fact he allowed Will's mind to continue on fire for months. "You still enjoyed the performance."

Will clenches his fist. The memory of his encephalitis is still intensely raw, and Hannibal's current glibness is not helping. Will glares at him and moves to march past, their shoulders brushing as Hannibal does not step to the side.

"Thanks for dinner, *Doctor.*" Will hisses the title out as he brushes by, as if to remind Hannibal of the code of ethics he so flagrantly violated.

Will reaches for the door before Hannibal can walk around and open it for him or say something else. His fingers pause over the brass knob, a burnished lion's head, its lips pulled back in a snarl.

He suddenly remembers a fragment of the theater, red as blood. Hannibal's words echoing in the dark.

*"A beautiful thing to behold when the mind gives way. And yet," Hannibal shifted, his hand grasping Will more firmly, "the fires of the flesh are nothing compared to the yearnings of the heart."*

*Will flushed, his body suddenly hollow. He ached all over.*

*Whether it was the fever or something else he was unsure.*

Will feels warmth spread across the back of his neck and cheeks. He slowly turns, fingers still outstretched over the doorknob, and looks behind him. Hannibal merely stands there, watching.

What yearnings of Hannibal could he capture? Did he want to capture?

Will had offered sex. Instead Hannibal had demanded companionship and control. Now he wanted something more and the memory of the theater, of Hannibal grasping Will's hand in the dark, sets something thrumming in his blood. Pulls him to acquiesce.

What happens when you indulge the devil?

*Jack had sat on the ice, his voice strong and clear.*

*“You hook him” Jack promised, eyes burning. “And I’ll catch him.”*

Hannibal is still as a statue, a predatory smirk teasing the corners of his lips.

The silence stretches between them.

“The opera?” Will finally asks, hating himself for considering.

Hannibal's smile widens, revealing teeth in the shadows of the foyer.

“Faust.”

Will closes his eyes and gives an unexpected laugh, allowing a shiver to wash over him. Faust - how appropriate. The man who sold his soul to Satan.

He turns, opening the front door and stepping out into the night. The voice of Lucia ringing softly in his ears.

*Chiari, oh Dio! Ben chiari e tristi nel tuo dir presagi intendo!*

*“Oh God, in your story, clear and grave are the omens I see!”*

## Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! Some quick notes – as we get into season 2 rather than just rehashing all of the show's crimes I wanted to do a few murder tableaux of my own. However the show's murder Tableaus are still pretty significant character touchstones....so I kept them too (while still trying to make them slightly different for funsies). Basically in between the shows murders and my new murders my outline is running WAY over 10 chapters. So yeah.... bare with me lol. But I guess that means more chapters of sexual tension and smut, so yay!

As far as the opera: I'm not done with Lucia di Lammermoor but act three of that opera need to be saved for later so we are introducing a new opera – Faust. So while Hannibal took Will to see Lucia di Lammermoor in the past in season 1 (when Will was jacked up on encephalitis) Hannibal is taking Will to see Faust three weeks in the future (in the midst of sexy times). Lucia is in Italian and Faust is in French if the converging opera timelines start to get confusing. I can also label them ::Past:: ::Present:: if anyone is worried, just let me know!

And as a friendly public service announcement - if you are ever negotiating kinks and power transfers in real life don't be as dumb as Will Graham and pick a safe word \*sentence\* in another language (sheesh Will) or blindly agree to God knows what (especially not with a serial killer cannibal, gosh Will). Basically ask yourself What-Would-Will-Graham-Do-In-This-Fic and immediately do the opposite.

Also, yes, Grosse Tête is a real Louisiana town with a damn tiger at a truck stop. Welcome to the American South. I apologize on behalf of every non-US national reading this fic - the South is truly a weird place to live.

As always if you are enjoying please Please PLEASE comment! Feedback means the world to me and I get so inspired by your comments. I legit sit here and obsessively reread your comments like a total nerd. They inspire me to get these chapters written as quickly as possible!

Finally if you want to shoot the breeze online, ask questions, or read snippets of chapters as I write them I am <http://lovelylaceandlilac.tumblr.com/> on tumblr. My ask box is always open and I love meeting new fannibals!

# S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento?

## Chapter Summary

What if swallowing Abigail's ear wasn't the only memory Hannibal buried?

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“You hope to entice me with a coiffured hair and a pressed shirt.” Hannibal's voice is a sibilant sigh, the echo of a serpent in the garden long ago. “But the niceties of Man pale before the passions of Nature.”

Will shudders as the doctor's fingers ghost down his neck.

“Remember, mon précieux,” Hannibal intones darkly, “that when an wolf seeks to seduce they offer their throat.”

## Chapter Notes

S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento?

What do I feel if this is not love?

~Petrarch

-----

HUGE shout out to my beta's Gwilbers and Em\_C. Both are incredible editors who keep me writing and (relatively) sane. In addition to editing my appalling grammar Gwilbers literally soothed all my fears about this chapter when I couldn't stop whining and gave me the confidence to rewrite the dinner scene (trust me it was no good before). She helps me flesh out my chapters beforehand, and trust me they are better with her fun ideas and advice. Meanwhile Em\_C tirelessly reworked all my awkward phrasing (I have a love affair with the passive tense) and rounded up all my crazy tense changes (they were hopping all over the place folks). And if Will Graham seems sassier this chapter that is all her fantastic influence (and who doesn't need more sassy!Will). They truly put in a substantial amount of time editing and without them this chapter would truly be a hot mess!

## **Chapter 5**

Hannibal's hand drapes possessively across Will's shoulder as they enter the Opera House.

Hannibal's companion, marked clear for the world to see.

Will feels it as clearly as if it's been tattooed on his flesh. The word *beloved* imprinted in ink seventy seven times, etched on his skin like the corpse in the daffodils.

The devil's brand.

The Authur Modell Performance Art Center looks different than his memories. Will takes in the lush curtains, the crown molding, the plush wine carpets, all without the frightening haze of the fever.

Hannibal shift's his hand to the small of Will's back – guiding him to their private box.

Will is drowning in a different kind of heat now.

“What language is the performance in?” Will turns towards him as he takes his seat. He doesn't bother to ask for the translation this time.

Hannibal smiles the serpent's grin and the lights dim.

“The language of passion.” His eyes glimmer as they meet Will's. “French.”

~~~~~

Will is halfway through unpacking and a truly atrocious cup of coffee when the phone rings. His office isn't really an office at all it's more of a storage closet full of boxes and filing cabinets with a desk shoved in one corner. A temporary space, half forgotten until Jack needed a place to put Will once he finally snatched him from teaching, all disjointed with the storage item's of other's leaving no room for Will's spartan possessions. It may be plaster and paper, but it feels like a metaphor for Will's life at the FBI.

He resents it.

Will dials 7 and cradles the headset as he continues to sip his lukewarm coffee.

“How soon can you get to the airport?” Jack's voice barks out, completely devoid of morning pleasantries.

“I had planned a lovely morning of sprucing up the closet you've assigned to me.”

“Cool your decorating. I need you in Atlanta.”

Will puts down the coffee, pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers. “How many bodies?”

“Zeller and Price can fill you in on the details at the airport.” Jack is yelling at someone in the background. “Just get down here.” There is a sharp click and then nothing but a dial tone.

Will hangs up, sighing as he eyes the boxes sprawled around him.

It's not like he could make a difference in this excuse for a coffin anyway.

~~~~

Will spots Zeller and Price to the right of the ticket desk as he disembarks from the plane. They are arguing about how far a newborn giraffe falls before it hits the ground.

“Surely they squat?” Zeller is bending his knees for emphasis.

“Giraffe's don't have the thigh capacity to squat.” Price's expression suggests that Zeller, and not the topic itself, is the craziest thing in the world. “The baby just pops out and falls.”

“That has got to be at least a four feet drop?!” Zeller is shaking his head and gathering his laptop. “Do they not have bones?”

“Six foot drop actually.” Price spies Will and waves. “There is our connection.”

Zeller stiffens as Will approaches. As if Will had killed the ludicrous conversation.

“Did the murder happen at a zoo?” Will had meant to join in the fun, but his tone comes out acidic and sharp.

Zeller narrows his eyes. Price only looks marginally put out. They should be used to Will's surly nature. Will doesn't know why he even bothers.

Price has the dignity to ignore his jab. “Have you ever been to Atlanta? We need to meet Jack in Midtown.”

Will scratches the back of his neck. "I attended a forensic conference at Emory a few years ago. Hartsfield is pretty far from Atlanta. We should take the subway downtown and get a cab from there."

Price gives a pointed look at Will's ratty duffle bag.

"You packed light."

"All I need are clothes and my laptop." *And my mind.* Will doesn't have to say it, it's clear that is what they are thinking.

"Well *Wonder Boy*, some of us have forensic equipment we have to pick up at baggage claim." Zeller brushes past Will.

Will can feel Zeller's bitterness, can feel the tension of his thoughts thick enough to cut.

*You sent Beverly to her death. They ring. You might as well have done it yourself.*

Somewhere in that rage is guilt, Will knows, guilt that they never listened to Beverly. But it is easier to blame Will than blame themselves.

Will shuffles in place, adjusting his laptop bag.

"I won't hold you up." His tone is dismissive. "See you at the crime scene."

It isn't his job to offer forgiveness.

~~~~

Will had been contemplating an egg salad sandwich when Beverly walked up. She marched with the air of a woman on a mission and snatched away the bill he was smoothing against the vending machine faster than he could protest.

“That's not real food.” Her tone was stern but she was smiling. “We try not to kill the new ones in the first week.”

Will pushed his glasses up and glowered, only to meet the back of her head as she began thumbing through the dispenser catalogue.

“I'm not a trainee.” Will bit out. The idea that Jack had sent her to watch out for him flashed through his mind unannounced. He had just been rubber stamped to consult with the Shrike case and had not done much to endear himself to the department in the days that followed.

“Which is why you need real food.” Beverly looked up from the machine as if it were patently obvious. “College kids can digest ramen and bullets. Us old geezers need actual sustenance.” Not finding what she was looking for Beverly headed towards the door, motioning for Will to follow. “Come on.”

“Do you normally insult people's choice in lunch and take their money on the first day?” Will wanted his five back and to eat in peace.

“You've been in and out of Jack's office all week and were consulting at Elise Nichole's house last night.” Beverly took two rights and jabbed at the elevator button. “It's not your first day.” Beverly looked over her shoulder as the elevator opened. “Or are you trying to forget?”

“You asked if I was unstable last night. How could I forget?” Will muttered and reached out and held the elevator door with more force than necessary. “Where are you taking me?”

“First floor. We have a cafe by the courtyard. It's not Panera but there is passable coffee and a deli. Just no work talk around the civilians.”

Will frowned and reluctantly entered the elevator.

Coffee did sound nice.

They rode the elevator in silence. Beverly thumbed through her phone absently as Will glowered at the ceiling.

“At least they don't make us endure elevator music.” Beverly grinned.

“When is the last time you actually heard music in an elevator?” Will's tone came out snide, still feeling the sting of unwelcome company.

“Fair enough.” Beverly waved a dismissive hand as the doors opened. “Guess they don't really play the stuff outside department store malls in eighties sitcoms.”

“Great cultural primers I'm sure.” Will grunted, fiddling with his glasses and following Beverly down the hall. “Is that where you learned to steal a man's lunch money?”

“You are determined to be as much of a dick as possible, aren't you?” Beverly rolled her eyes and held open the door to the courtyard. In the left corner stood a shop – more convenience store than cafe. Purveyors of coffee and deodorant to support the FBI's crazy hours and overworked officers. She stepped forward abruptly, blocking his path as Will tried to pass through the door.

“I'm not buying the churlish asshole act.”

Beverly jabbed her index finger into his chest. “We are going to work together so you can quit snarling because I'm not going anywhere.”

Will stood there, momentarily stunned. He could feel Beverly's energy - bright, clean, and implacable like the humming of LED lights. He was almost tempted to smile against his better judgement.

"I work best alone." Will shook his head and moved forward.

"Don't all ex cops." Beverly rolled her eyes and stepped aside. "Too bad you are on a team."

"Yeah too bad." And he meant it. Beverly's friendly demeanor wouldn't last.

It never did.

~~~~~

The scene of the crime is the kitchen of an expensive condo in Atlanta overlooking Piedmont Park. The condo was built recently but the couple had it renovated in 50's retro style. The cabinets are bright teal, the floor tile black and white check. In the center of the kitchen sits a white circular table surrounded by four white and red dome chairs.

The young couple are propped up in two of the chairs. Both their eyes are gouged out. Their hearts are missing, cut from the gaping holes in their chest. Blood pools around the center of the table like a large red lake.

Both are dressed in rockabilly style; the woman's slick black victory curls in contrast to her pale skin and crimson red lips. The man sits opposite to her, hair gelled back in a pompadour, shiny as his black leather jacket. The man had been clutching a news-paper with one hand and bowl of fruit and French toast lays before her with two empty champagne flutes. Their hands are tightly clasped between them, suspended stiffly between their chairs, blood still dripping from their fingers.

In the center of the table sits a bright bouquet of yellow day lilies, trailing bluebells, and blood red peonies. The flowers support two bleeding hearts and a pair of eyes nestle in the petals like hidden pearls.

“Nothing like Golden era Americana.” Zeller whistles.

“Talk about Pop Art.” Price chuckles dryly. “Death by Jasper Johns.”

“An artistic ghost would be appropriate.” Zeller sighs. “There are no signs of a forced entry.”

Jack looks unamused. Will merely catches his eye and nods.

It was time.

“All right, everybody out.” Jack shouts, motioning agents towards the equally retro hallway and living room.

The pendulum starts to swing, yellow and pulsing.

“Do you mind if I stay, Will?” Hannibal has materialized from the throng of personnel like shadow. “Watching you work gives me immeasurable insight.”

Will's head snaps up. He hadn't noticed Hannibal standing in the back of the room, hadn't known Jack had requested him on this case.

For a moment Will fears he's hallucinating the doctor.

Jack pauses at the doorframe, gesturing at Hannibal, waiting for Will's permission.

Will can only nod. Jack see's him too. He must be real.

Hannibal smiles coolly, his eyes dark red flecks of blood in the florescent lights.

Will shivers, turning back to the corpses in the center of the room.

The pendulum swings again, humming as it erases blood, restoring eyes and breath to the couple sprawled on the table.

“They were cooking breakfast.” Will mummurs. He can see the happy couple at the counter, the man frying French toast as she slices the fruit. The scene wavers in and out of focus, and suddenly Will is at the teal counter, apron around his hips, cutting board beneath his fingers.

*“You have a deft hand with a knife.” Hannibal hums approval into Will's ear. “You may slice the cantaloupe next.”*

*Will is peeling the melon balls. He tries not to shiver.*

*“I may?” Will turns but Hannibal has already moved to the French toast.*

*Hannibal dips the bread in the egg and milk and then lays them in the skillet for frying.*

*“Would you prefer I order you?”*

Will gasps, shaking his head and stumbling backwards. He turns to brace himself on the garish teal cabinets only to spy Hannibal to his right, head cocked in curiosity, eyes crinkled in pleasure.

“Domestic bliss?” The doctor mouths softly, and Will feels his stomach roll.

Hannibal does not know what images had just merged in his mind's eye, but his words still ring like a death knell.

*Domestic Bliss.*

Will reaches out and grasps the nearest drawer handle until the metal bites into his palm. Centering him.

He closes his eyes again.

Will sits at the table with Hannibal and breakfast, his hands folded in his flared skirt and no *no he isn't doing this again.*

Will grits his teeth, grinds them and tenses until his face shimmers and is replaced with the murdered woman. Hannibal still sits in the man's seat, cocky smile and gelled hair, the newspaper laid out before him like an Atlas of the world. Will stands in the doorway looking at the picture they create.

But at least Will is now embodying the murders' perspective and *not the wife.*

The woman looks up, smiling at Will. She laughs. “We've been expecting you.”

“I brought something to drink.” Will pops the champagne, removing the cork and slipping in the rohypnol once the foam stops in one deft motion.

They drink, Will pretending to sip, until the couple's eyes cloud and they slump forward. Except now it is no longer the man and woman, but Alana and Jack slumped forward against

the table. And Hannibal is beside Will, a portable electric saw in his hand.

*“You don't have to you know.” Will cannot help but snort at Hannibal's assistance as he cuts into Jack's chest. Something about his vanity, his ridiculous fussiness even as he is removing a man's heart is familiar in a way that makes Will relax in spite of his seething rage, his festering wound.*

*“You are my partner.” Hannibal removes the circular cut bone like he would the lid to a cookie jar. He reaches inside and with one quick motion has torn out the heart. “You spent so much time assisting the meal's presentation. Should I not match your labor?”*

*Will glances at the misshapen eye balls he has plucked out nestled amidst Alana's heart in the bouquet of flowers.*

*“My contributions look jacked.”*

*Hannibal digs a spoon into Jack's head and pops out his eyes like unraveled buttons. He places them in the bouquet and sits, leaving Jack's heart resting on a plate.*

*“But they are appreciated none the less.”*

*“Is that your way of saying A-for-effort?” Will snorts and takes the opposing seat.*

*“Mistakes in the kitchen hone valuable skills and are therefore almost always worthwhile.” Hannibal has taken a plate and knife and is sawing into Jack's heart, cutting tiny slices away. He holds up a fork for Will, and Will leans forward to take a bite.*

*“You clearly haven't tasted my cooking.” Will murmurs before taking Jack's heart into his mouth.*

*Hannibal looks up from his fork as he feeds Will and smiles, a dark promise inked in blood and ruin.*

*"I would like to."*

Will does throw up now, runs to the sink and hurls up bits of the greasy Krispy Kreme coffee he had for breakfast in the airport earlier. And Hannibal is behind him, grasping Will to keep him steady.

"You were magnificent." He is cooing in Will's ear, a slick rush of whispers and sin wrapping around his head. "Interpreting a masterpiece like the curator of all the world's horrors."

Will can feel Hannibal's hand on the base of his neck, murmuring sweet nothings as he strokes his lower back in a soothing motion. And it only makes Will shudder and heave harder, that Will's doctor and relief is literally the devil.

His praise and acceptance is poison and worse, Will eventually relaxes into his comfort.

Jack and the rest slowly trickle back into the kitchen. Will is slumped against Hannibal's side, drinking a cup of water the doctor had procured from the cabinet and offered. And for a moment Will sees himself through Jack's eyes, hates himself for how he must look, curled into Hannibal's side, trembling like a leaf.

The head of the BAU averts his gaze.

"What did you see Will?" Because the oracle is what is important here, not what the visions do to the seer.

"They died in the kitchen, the heart of the home. They were imperfect domesticity. A pale figment of what they should have been." Will croaks out, his voice dry and raspy. "But I made them into the perfect couple in death. Gave them the communion they never had in life."

Will turns his head into Hannibal's suit, choking on the words that tumble from his lips like a curse.

“Love makes us blind and heartless,” Will can feel Hannibal's finger's tighten around his shoulders, “but I gave them the American Dream.”

~~~

“How is Abigail?”

Will looked up from where he was sitting in a secluded corner of the courtyard eating a turkey sandwich. Beverly had taken up the habit of crashing his lunches once or twice a week. Not often enough to truly impinge upon his solitude. Just frequent enough to remind him that the spaces he occupied were as barren as his social skills.

Not that his prickly nature bothered Beverly. She liked Will, and for all the wrong reasons. She managed to be simultaneously curious and completely disinterested, more concerned with his opinion on pizza toppings than how he got into killer's minds. Like a teasing sister, content to badger and occasionally annoy.

It was comforting in it's own way.

“She's okay. Hates support group.” Will munched absently, not willing to betray anymore of Abigail's confidence than vagaries. The sandwich was good. His stomach had been running on coffee and aspirin for what felt like days.

Beverly nodded, popping open a bag of potato chips and sitting on the ledge next to him. She dissected her own sandwich with a crooked grin, removing the onions and replacing them with chips before putting the whole thing back together.

Will allowed himself a small smile.

“Where did you grow up?” Beverly asked, munching absently around her lunch.

Will looked up sharply. “Why?”

“You smiled at my sandwich. The chips. That's a Southern thing.” Beverly shrugged. “Plus your accent is fake.”

“How would you know?” Will asked, suddenly hyper aware of his pronunciation.

“I'm good at accents.” Beverly chewed thoughtfully. “Yours is always too perfect to be real. Radio announcer perfect.”

“Maybe I should look into a new job.” Will smiled jaggedly. He probably should. He felt like shit lately. “Sounds less bloody. Maybe they have better lunch options.”

“Because you are *so* the jovial airwave personality type.” She flicked a stray piece of onion into the leaves. “I'm serious though, where are you from?”

“Where do you think?” Will tensed. He liked Beverly, but she wasn't Hannibal. He got along with her because she didn't pry. At least not about his personal life.

“The South.” She frowned, finding another stray bit on onion in her lettuce.

“You already guessed that from the look I gave the sandwich.”

“Mmmm.” Beverly hummed. “Why did you get rid of it?”

“Mine wasn't the gente Savannah drawl.” Will crumpled the cellophane from his lunch in his fist. “People assume things.”

“Like that you're are poor and uneducated?” Beverly snorted. “Since when do *you* care what people think?”

Will clutched the wrapper convulsively. He stood abruptly.

“Hey, did I hit a nerve?”

Will looked at her. Beverly wiggled her eyebrows unrepentantly, her hair messy in the Autumn breeze.

“No.” He shoved his hands in his jacket and made a beeline towards the door. He was being obvious and childish.

He didn't care.

“Oh for fuck's sake.” Beverly followed, running behind him, sandwich in hand. “Slow down drama queen.” Beverly grabbed his arm and narrowed her eyes. “We've all got childhoods, Will. The past only haunts those obsessed with it.”

Will stared beyond her at the trees in the courtyard. The boughs were brown and grey, the last of the leaves haven fallen weeks ago. He thought of Abigail, the scar on her throat and the words 'Cannibals' scrawled garish and black on the garage.

The past was only discarded by those whose memories were light enough to throw.

~~~~~

The killer struck again in Atlanta three days later.

Gone was the rockabilly 50's golden era Americana. The next couple were two trust fund babies turned carefree artists; pre-distressed skinny jeans and black turtlenecks paired with Navaho sterling silver jewelry and an unkempt man bun. Their craftsman home in the east side of Atlanta's Virginia Highlands was modern and worldly; stainless steel chrome kitchens contrasted against ceramic chakra bowls and post modern art. A yoga mat rolled up in the corner of the office, all organic food in the fridge, two sports cars in the garage and a dog eared copy of Atlas Shrugged on the counter.

Will was tempted to hate them on principle.

The couple was ensconced on what had once been a white suede couch before massive quantities of dried blood had stained it the color of rust. They sat curled around each other, their shoulders joining in a V, hands clasped between them yet again, fingers intertwined. Their hearts were gone, eyes gouged out like before, staring emptily at the LCD television across the couch that cheerily displayed the Netflix logo. A bowl of popcorn on the glass coffee table sat before another bouquet of flowers. Yellow dahlias, chartreuse roses, white lilies, dusty miller, and blooms that Will didn't recognize supported the two hearts, nestled in the riot of petals.

“Date night gone terribly wrong.” Price had muttered, photographing the deceased lovers.

“Netflix and *kill*, right?” Zeller had cackled back, nudging Price in the ribs.

Will stood, feeling like an outsider intruding on something he knew others did in theory only.

Nights curled up around another person, the cackle of a fire, the flicker of a film shared with a lover in silence. The feeling of relaxing against another, a shared space built together, *companionship*.

Will does not glance back to the doorway. Hannibal would be standing there, tall and inscrutable, absorbing the screams rent in the air of domesticity. An alien in these shared spaces, another lone wolf wondering at the portrait of intimacy normal people had created.

*Different.*

Will shudders, staring at the couple's clasped hands in a pool of drying blood. He thinks of roots in the river bank, deep beneath the damp earth, fingers entangled where the light would never reach.

It was the only way trees could touch.

He can see Hannibal's hands in his, bones fused together, phalanges to metacarpus, trembling flesh and pooling blood.

Will would rather be alone.

~~~

When Will was told he had a visitor he gave Chilton a look that could only be described as incredulous.

Jack had already visited Will in prison. So had Hannibal. Both coming to see the havoc that had been wrought, although for different reasons.

Alana had visited too, and that had been painful enough. Will hadn't even needed to be in a relationship with her to wound her the way she feared he would.

And that was it. That was the list of people Will expected. He didn't have a circle of friends or family – just his boss, his doctor, and his almost lover.

So when Beverly walked in the visitation cell, he was taken aback and unguarded. He hadn't expected the rush of gratitude. The profound warmth that maybe, in spite of all he had done to distance himself from others, to bite and snarl and push, he had more than just loneliness.

Jack, Hannibal, and Alana had seen him out of obligation, curiosity, and closure. Beverly had no other reason to be there except she cared.

“It's good to see you.” He stumbled, hating the fragile surprise in his voice.

Beverly gave a tight smile and sat across from him.

“Don't know how I feel about seeing you.” She raised an eyebrow with ill humor and nodded. “I'll let you know when I do.”

Will bite back something childish and needy. Beverly was ruthlessly honest. Even in such an awkward situation she would be direct.

I was like a cold spring morning, bracing but refreshing all the same.

Will had been lied to enough.

“Does Jack know you are here?” He couldn't help the niggling doubt that maybe she wasn't here of her own accord.

“No.” Beverly forced a crooked grin. “But he shouldn't be surprised.”

Will thought of all those lunches in the courtyard. When Beverly had told him pineapple and pepperoni was a travesty and he should be ashamed. As if that was the ugliest thing about him.

He felt his smile unfurl, grateful and unsure.

“I’m surprised.” And he was. Desperately lonely and frighteningly relieved.

Beverly leaned back, staring at his smile like a foreign animal, one that had come begging for touch but was covered with oozing scabs and fleas.

“I’m compartmentalizing.” She cleared her throat and looked past his head. “There are a lot of people missing.”

When Beverly turned away and reached down for the case file Will physically felt the blow.

In all the cruelties of human emotion, hope hurt the most.

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Will sits with Price on the pea green shag carpet of the cheap Atlanta motel bedroom suite. They had been at it for two days straight, personnel coming in and out of the room. Crime scene photos and Styrofoam coffee cups littered the floor, couch, and coffee table like some morbid rendition of Twister.

A sharp knock on the door sounds and an agent Will doesn't recognize steps in clutching a stack of folders. She looks young, cheeks still faintly scarred from what must have been terrible acne as a teen.

“Lab results for the Viau's.” The agent stands uncertainly, brow furrowed at the mess, until Price grabs them and dismisses her.

“What time is it?” Price grumbles, taking the results and spreading them into a sundial pattern on the floor.

Will scrubs his face and stares blearily at the clock on the microwave of the kitchenette.

“Almost 7 pm.”

“Jesus, go get me more coffee.” Price moans.

“Not your intern.” Will snaps. “Get it yourself.”

“Fine.” Price glares up from the folders. “So grumpy. Where is Brian when you need him?”

“You sent him to get us chicken and waffles an hour ago.” Will pushes his now greasy hair back and resumes typing away at the profile he was forming. He needed a shower and a nap.

Price lets out a low whistle.

“Rohypnol again,” he says, “7-aminoflunitrazepam found post mortem. Enough that the flunitrazepam levels would have been fatal before degradation. They died of respiratory distress before they were cut into.”

Will frowns, stretching out his legs and drumming his fingers against his thigh. His phone buzzes expectantly. Will fishes it out with tired fingers.

*I new text from Dr. Hannibal Lecter.*

Will shoves it back into his pocket. That is the last thing he needs now.

“The Cornell's were expecting their killer that morning.” Will turns back to his laptop and resumes his tapping. “They had just gotten back from their honeymoon. The killer arrived for breakfast with a bottle of champagne.”

“Newly-weds,” Price rolls his eyes. “It's all champagne, sex, and congratulations until the kids come along.”

Will ignores him. Price and Zeller may work best with wisecracking but it only distracts Will.

“The second couple, the Viau's, weren't newly-weds. They had been married almost 8 months. ” Will motions to the pictures of the couple theatrically murdered on their couch in front of the TV. “So who were they expecting that night? Like the Cornell's they *knew* their killer and let him in the house. Let him drug them.”

“We didn't find anything roofied at the Viau's.” Price shrugs. “Even the popcorn was clean.”

“The killer must have taken it with him when he left.” Will sighs, scrubbing his hands against his eyes once again. He is so tired. His phone buzzes again. “But you are missing the point. Who do you let in the house?”

“The pizza man?” Zeller's head pops through the door as he balances a takeout bag and manages to plop down on the only chair not covered with paper. “Pepperoni with a side of disemboweling?”

“Chili dogs?” Price opens up the Styrofoam containers with disappointment. “I thought you were bringing Chicken and Waffles?”

“Gladys Night's is *really* popular.” Zeller pulls a face. “Also they don't do take out.”

“Oh,” Price munches thoughtfully before holding a grease soaked bag labeled *The Varsity* towards Will. “Onion ring?”

Will stares. His days of aspirin abuse have left his stomach lining a wreck. After forty eight hours of nothing but coffee and vending machine snacks fried food was pushing his luck.

“You don't have a chili dog for me?” Will sighs and reaches forward to pick through the bag. Maybe he could scrape the chili off and just eat the hotdog.

“No. Ran into Dr. Lecter leaving Jack's suite on my way out.” Zeller looks up confused. “Said you had dinner plans, he was cooking?”

As if on cue Will's phone buzzes a third time.

Will scowls and hands the bag back to Price.

*Of course he did.*

Will flips out his phone to type out his emphatic refusal. He would live on onion rings and heart burn before giving Hannibal the satisfaction of manipulating a dinner date on a case.

“Lucky.” Price practically moaned. “Jack's stories about his cooking are legendary.”

“Not sure what he could possibly cook in this shit hole.” Zeller lifts an eyebrow at the kitchenette.

“Don't kid yourself.” Will doesn't look up as he taps out a particularly pithy rejection. “He's staying at a full suite at the Georgian Terrace.”

Price rolls his eyes, but Zeller leans forward suddenly, as if struck by something.

“You guys are weirdly close again, aren't you?” Zeller narrows his eyes, a sudden suspicious spark coming to them like a child deciphering a word problem.

Will's finger hover over the Send button. “He's my doctor.” He says the words slowly as if they are self evident, as if his heart isn't pounding.

“I've never accused my doctor of being a serial killer.” Zeller says, raising an eyebrow. “Or embraced him at a crime scene for that matter.”

*The Cornell's kitchen.*

*Jack and the rest slowly trickled back into the kitchen. Will is slumped against Hannibal's side, drinking a cup of water Hannibal had procured from the cabinet and offered.*

“Take your doctor to crime scenes often, then?” Will bites out. He was aiming for sardonic, it just comes out defensive.

“Not really unstable enough to warrant it.” Zeller's response is deceptively light. He doesn't need to raise his voice to cut deep.

Will grinds his teeth.

He isn't stupid. So far Hannibal hadn't consulted with them on the case, yet Jack had requested he come along and be at the crime scenes. Requested he travel all the way to Atlanta for days.

Will may have been cleared of all charges, but not of his reputation for instability in the eyes of the board. Kade Prunell was practically breathing down every inch of this investigation.

Zeller just continues to stare, waiting for Will's acerbic rebuttal.

Will's hand spasms around his phone.

Price looks between the two of them like a child caught between two parents eager for divorce.

Will deletes his pithy text, shoves his phone back in his pocket and stands.

“I've got to run.” He grits out. “*Dinner plans.*”

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Will can smell it the moment he steps in room.

Tastefully draped in navy, gold and cream with chrome fixtures and granite countertops there was nothing remotely recognizable about Hannibal's massive hotel suite. Yet the air was thick, suffused with something that cajoled and beckoned, something that smelled earthy and familiar.

Will clenches his fist at the door.

With his luck it was probably people.

Hannibal greets Will in a navy apron in the entranceway. He raises an eyebrow at Will's locked jaw and flared nostrils before shaking his head.

“Rabo del Toro.” Hannibal smoothly relieves Will of his coat with deft fingers. “I purchased the meat this morning. You may send it off for inspection if you like, although I dare say it will be quite cold by the time they are through.” A small twinkle gleams in Hannibal's eyes.

Of course he is amused.

Will snorts in exasperation, as if the thought that it might be people hadn't just been on his mind.

“I don't appreciate you manipulating me into a dinner date.” Will cracks his shoulders and stalks into the spacious kitchenette. An assortment of foodstuffs line the counter already half prepped in small ceramic dishes; tomatoes, peppers, wild long grain rice and bowls of things Will doesn't recognize.

“Was it wrong to assume you hadn't been eating?” Hannibal's assured tone is a decimal shy of smug.

“It's not the assumption I don't appreciate and you know it.” Will replies sharply.

“You could have refused.” Hannibal states, unruffled.

“Yeah, and you conveniently saw to it I would have gone without another meal if I did.” Will frowns, poking idly at the bowl containing rice and an assortment of spices. Hannibal could write a veritable book on the things he has done that Will doesn't appreciate. Will would prefer to prevent its sequel. “Don't try and force my hand. Next time I will refuse you out of spite.”

“We often overstep boundaries when we feel those we care about are not living safely within them.” Hannibal reaches for the aerating bottle of *Château Mouton Rothschild Cabernet*

Sauvignon. “Wine?”

“It would go straight to my head.” Will waves a dismissive hand and fills a glass from the tap instead. “I had a gallon of coffee and no real food in two days.” Will pauses, glass raised, and scowls. “Which I suppose was the point of asking me.”

Hannibal says nothing, but Will can feel the sharp smirk bubbling beneath the mask. A stray comment strikes Will.

“You’ve been cooking since this morning?” Will narrows his eyes and finishes his water, wishing it were coffee. “You only texted me 30 minutes ago?”

“Only the roast. I had meant to surprise you.” Hannibal carefully pushes his sleeves up and resumes mining the garlic. “You were bent like king Sisyphus at the crime scene the other day, ever rolling the stone of perception uphill for Uncle Jack. I had hoped a good meal might unburden your soul and allow you a decent night’s rest.”

Hannibal relates the metaphor casually, if he hadn’t just confessed to surreptitiously cooking for Will all day like a concerned housewife.

Will stares, torn between feeling shitty at his earlier prickliness and something entirely different, color flushing his cheeks as his traitorous heart stutters. He grasps for an appropriate response, each more damning than the last:

You don't have to bother yourself.

It's not like I'm not used to it.

I don't need anyone to take care of me.

I don't expect these things

I don't expect...

Will scowls and finally waves an incredulous hand. “Did you bring that apron?”

Deflection is the safest course.

“Yes.” Hannibal looks up from where he was slicing garlic, a flicker of something unreadable in his eyes. “A little piece of home.”

Home.

Will nods absently, internally shaking himself, pushing a nagging sensation to the back of his mind. He was exhausted and emotionally raw. His emotions were cross wiring. “Do you need me to help prep?”

“If you would like.” Hannibal's eyes crinkle with restrained pleasure. “You may chop the parsley and the chives.” Hannibal turns to the cabinet before producing another apron for Will.

Will pauses longer than strictly necessary. He is struck dumb, staring at Hannibal's outstretched arms, holding the apron forward like an invitation. The way a relative cradles a Christmas present like a lure, the expectation that the child will take the gift and, in the process, will run into their waiting embrace.

Will silently accepts the apron.

His fingers shake.

He chops the parsley methodically at the granite island in silence, peripherally aware of Hannibal bustling behind him. The scent of the parsley is fresh and cleansing; days of blood, coffee, and corpses leaving him unprepared for the burst of aromatherapy beneath his knife. He inhales deeply, feeling his body relax against his will. Hannibal finishes with the garlic and moves to the island, reaching around the younger man in a brush of cotton and warmth to retrieve the bowl of peppers before returning to the main counter.

Hannibal hums as he slices. Bits of a classical piece Will can't place.

It's soothing.

The rhythmic chop of the knife, Hannibal's deep baritone. Will imagines waves at the dock, the steady slap against wood over and over.

His father taking him fishing, humming along the pier. Snippets of the Almond Brothers and Bob Dylan. Red beans and rice packed in Tupperware, Will spitting out the minced green onions into the water.

Will finishes chopping the parsley and frowns, resisting the pull of something sweet and heavy. He never saw the point in garnishes.

Everything get swallowed in the end.

Hannibal continues to hum as he moves back to the island. His hand splays briefly against the small of Will's back as he reaches around him for the bowl of rice.

Intimate.

The touch is steady and warm, and Will has to fight not lean into it, not to be drawn towards him, like the boy standing in front of the rickety radiator in a run down apartment in Port Clinton. Will had been a teenager, all elbows and legs when they moved to his uncle's

apartment in Ohio. The scar on his arm itched whenever he saw a radiator, the memory of burning himself as a child seared in.

The things we seek comfort from aren't always safe.

Will bites back something bitter and reaches to start chopping the chives.

Hannibal removes his hand as he returns to the stove, still humming; a content expression upon his face. He moves like a conductor, pouring rice in a pot, sautéing shallots and tomatoes in a skillet, deft hands and swift fingers.

Will pictures the corpse hands of the couples intertwined in red. Loving fingers grasping for each other, locked in death and despair.

He can see Hannibal's hands in his, bones fused together, phalanges to metacarpus, trembling flesh and pooling blood.

And the kitchen is no longer black and granite but ocher and orange, a rental house in the early 80's with the sun streaming in white cotton curtains.

The scene wavers in and out of focus, and suddenly Will is at the teal counter, apron around his hips, cutting board beneath his fingers, Hannibal at his back.

And he is standing on a chair frying an egg in the cast iron skillet. A yellow sun bleeding into the blackness of space.

“You have a deft hand with a knife.” Hannibal hums approval into Will's ear. “You may slice the shallots next.”

Will is mincing the chives. He tries not to shiver.

“I may?” Will turns but Hannibal is already moving back to the skillet.

Hannibal stops, head cocked to the side.

“You may what, Will?”

Hannibal stands there regarding Will with sharp eyes. Will realizes he was talking to a series of distorted memories.

“Would you prefer to assist over the stove?”

Will nods, the sensation of déjà vu still reeling within. He shudders, trying to claw down something dangerously fragile, something hungry and feral.

Hannibal says nothings, simply grasps him gently by the elbow; the heat of his hand steady, almost but not quite touching.

The doctor guides him to the stove. There is a saucepan with chicken stock, butter, and cream beginning to boil. The doctor hands him a whisk, fingers softly brushing his knuckles.

“Begin stirring.”

Hannibal lifts a bowl off the counter and begins pouring; a river of yellow sand cascading into the frothing white sea below.

And Will sees the whites of the couple's eyes in the pan, milky and glazed in the bouquet of blooms like clusters of hidden pearls in the lilies. Opaque and unseeing, plucked like flowers.

Plucked like dandelions in a child's hand.

Will watches as the white begins to thicken with yellow, yellow as the yellow kitchen, stirring and stirring round and round like carousel until the colors begin to blur and he can hear laughter and katydids, unrelenting and soft as the corn begins to rise.

Rising like the small yellow sun.

Will tosses the whisk down, fingers clenched in a fist by his side, nails digging in his palms.

“What are we cooking?” And the words feel heavy because he already knows.

Hannibal tilts his head to the side before coming behind Will. “Shrimp and polenta” his hand grasp Will's trembling fist and he raises the younger man's fist to grip the whisk again, “With sweet peppers, cacciatore, and pancetta” and Will is stirring again, stirring the bleeding sun, “with smoked tomato gravy and a garlic jus.”

“Shrimp and grits.” Will is grinding his teeth, the world spinning. “We are making fancy shrimp and grits.”

Hannibal hums in assent. He doesn't look up as he removes the sauce pan from the stove.

“Hannibal.” Will's voice is desperately quiet as he tries to keep it steady, tries to keep himself together. “What is in the oven?”

“Rabo del Toro.”

Will turns, fists snapping up to grab Hannibal's collar and back him against the island counter in a brutal motion.

“What. Is. In. The. Oven.”

Hannibal smiles, slowly with teeth.

“Braised Ox tail.”

And Will is laughing, a harsh strangled sound, his hands framed around Hannibal's throat.

Domestic Bliss.

And he laughs and laughs.

Because it's all so fucking terrible.

Will leans his forehead in, hands still loosely linked around Hannibal's throat. His hysteria leaves him in a wave, and he can hear his ragged breathing and wonders when the room will stop spinning.

“Swinging Sirloin is what dad called them.” Will's voice is cracked and jagged, as if he had just run several miles. “I could smell the bay leaves and fat when I walked in.”

Will leans back, dizzy with a sudden wave of nausea.

Hannibal nods, as if understanding something finally.

“We have never spoken of your family directly.” Hannibal grips his hips, voice soft, unwilling to give the space. “Would you like to now?”

Will shakes his head, the very thought setting his teeth on edge.

“This isn't a therapy session.”

“I had not planned for it to be, no.” Hannibal's voice is calculating as he releases Will all too suddenly, the cold air rushing back in. Unasked he pours a glass of wine and hands it to Will. “Would you prefer it? Would we discuss the footsteps that echo from the boy in the shadows?”

Will accepts the wine this time. Downs half the glass in one swallow.

“No and no. My dad was great full stop.” Will can't help the bite in his voice as he swishes the rest of his glass. Hannibal watches him like a hawk, the unblinking eyes of a predator on its prey. Of course he would never pass up a chance to pry inside Will's mind. If anything, Will realizes with a sudden bloom of suspicion, the doctor was the type to engineer this type of situation to deliberately throw Will off balance. To trigger his vulnerability to better explore his soft underbelly.

Will should have said his *parents* were great, not just *dad*.

How much did Hannibal suspect?

Will grinds his teeth and meets Hannibal's unwavering gaze.

“What you should wonder about is our current killer's family.”

Hannibal nods, accepting the redirect as if the change in conversation topic did not matter to him in the slightest. “Our killer builds scenes of domesticity.”

“Those are some messed up visions of home.” Will snorts, some of the tension ebbing away at the change in subject. He sips at his wine, slower this time.

Hannibal opens the oven and takes the oxtail out. With sure fingers and quick hands he begins plating the food, winter cabbage leaves and tomato roses providing a backdrop of purple and red. "Does it bother you that he targets the heart of the home specifically?"

"Yes." Will pauses, the thought grating wrong like a stone in his shoe. "No, no wait that's not right. Not the heart. There are no children."

"Must you possess progeny to form a family?" Hannibal does not look up from his plating.

"Yes, well no, but not here." Will waves his hand in agitation, suddenly struck with an idea. "Our killer is painting with stereotypes. The omission of children is *deliberate*."

"Maybe he thought they did not deserve them."

"He denied them their heart and their heart's desire because they could not see." Will exhales in a rush, the possibility of a breakthrough in the case raising goosebumps on his flesh.

"Such poetry." Hannibal murmurs, his voice heavy with something Will did not care to examine. "Finding rhyme and assonance in the meters of murder."

"Profiling is a science, not an art." Will says distractedly as he taps his fingers against his wine glass. He drinks another sip. The wine is relaxing him now, and feels the rush of getting close to something important.

"Only in the crude hands of others, perhaps." Hannibal's voice is warm, assessing. He nods at the assortment of dishes lining the counter like sculptures before turning to Will. "Science or art, what vision has you so enthralled?"

Will chews his lip and sips his wine.

“We've been looking at ex-lovers, family, and friends to find a connection between the victims.” Will turns the thought over in his mind. “What if it was someone who knew their family planning? Who do you talk to about your plans to reproduce?”

“Everyone I'm afraid.” Hannibal looks slightly put out as if the subject were gauche. “Or at least about the method of reproduction. Your culture is quite obsessed.”

“My culture?” Will laughs in spite of himself. Hannibal's pained expression was something Will found inherently amusing, probably because he saw so little of it.

“I have certainly not contributed to it. Or at least that particular excess.” Hannibal wrinkles his nose and moves to carry the plates to the table.

“Mmmm, you have enough excesses as it is.” Will raised his wine glass in salute, a smirk still tugging the corner of his mouth. “Preaching to the choir over here you know. I was never the type to kiss and tell.”

Will omits the part where he never had any conquests to boast about.

“Your life is thoroughly without excess.” Hannibal removes his apron and places a warm hand on Will's arm. “Pleasure is one of the many things I wish to introduce to you. Please,” he nods towards the dining area, “be seated.”

Will freezes on the spot, Hannibal's hand still wrapped lightly around his elbow. The doctor's comment could easily be read as concerning Will's utilitarian nature, or about the types of pleasure Will never kissed and told about.

Heat pools in his groin unannounced.

Hannibal's thumb begins to stroke small circles on his bicep, soft and tender.

Will breaks away, tearing the apron off and forcing his body back under control.

“Indulgence can be a crime.”

Hannibal follows Will into the dinning area and pours more wine as Will takes his seat.

“Would that your killer had never indulged?” *Or me*, Hannibal leaves unspoken.

“Yeah, something like that.” Will doesn't look up, transfixed by fare laid before him.

His past stares back, a smell so familiar it ached dressed up in tomato roses and artful garnishes. Swinging Sirloin and Shrimp and Grits. A poor boy's supper suspended on a finer man's plate. The feeling of exposure returns, and Will scrubs his fingers across his face, unsure how he can guard his secrets when his roots are what is to be dissected and served.

“At the very least,” Will pinches the bridge of his finger between his nose and sighs, “our killer could have had the decency not to indulge in domestic horror shows back to back.”

Hannibal gives an assessing look.

“You are tired.”

“Of corpses? Sure.”

Will is tired. Bone deep tired. And it is easier to admit to fatigue than longing born from an empty kitchen and a silent home.

He cannot bring himself to pick up the fork.

“Have you been unable to sleep or unwilling?”

“Do you want the truth or something else?” Will grabs the wine glass instead and drinks, long and slow. “Because I know which one a doctor would rather hear.”

“I don't engage in half truths.” Hannibal hasn't touched his food yet.

“Oh, that's rich coming from you.” Will snorts.

Hannibal watches Will for a moment, before leaning forward and placing his hand on Will's arm like the press of a furnace.

The touch of the radiator.

“The truth then.” Hannibal's eyes shine black and fathomless. “Do you not sleep because of what you see? Did you see yourself killing them?” Hannibal's voice is sharp and breathless, elevated. “Or did your own family take their place?”

Will feels a sudden stab of anger and allows an ugly laugh to burst forward.

It is like a damn, a bursting of water even though Will cannot cry.

“There are some things even I can't imagine.” Will's voice is harsh and torn and the words spill out like a hot geyser. “My parents happy together is one of them.”

“You believe the murdered couples were happy?”

Will stares at the oxtail over his bed of rice and herbs. The sauce bleeds brown and red, like blood and rust. His father's favorite dish for his favorite quiet boy. It doesn't matter his father only ever made it twice, his stories of it were endless. Will used to imagine the mother he never knew coming back and making it for them both. Standing there in the yellow kitchen smelling of soap and comfort, embracing him and whispering he was home.

Whispering he was loved.

He stabs the meat and it slides off the bone, stripping it naked and bare on the pale porcelain, white and bloody like his baby teeth in the sink.

“As happy as you can get.” He lifts his fork to his mouth. He will carve up his past and consume it, swallow it down. “They had each other, even in death. That has to count for something in the long run.”

Will chews and swallows his childhood. Stomach acid is powerful enough to destroy razor blades, which is appropriate as Will feels he is swallowing knives.

“Is that a projection of them or of you, Will?”

“All I have are ghosts.” Will smiles, slow and thin. “Who can tell their origin anymore?”

Hannibal regards him sharply, and Will can see when the mask slips off. He rises and bridges the distance, hand reaching out to grasp the back of Will's neck, tightens against his skull as if he would bury his fingers in his flesh and join with his grey matter.

“Were I the only thing that haunts you.” Hannibal hisses, his pupils black, eyes covetous. He tilts Will's head up, breath ghosting across Will's lips. “I would erase all others.”

Will can feel the knife in his belly, the blade he has swallowed, as Hannibal kisses him with dark urgency. And in some twisted way Hannibal's cruel touch feels like an embrace. A deformed echo of his bitter longing.

Hannibal was holding him now, smelling of soap and blood.

Whispering he was wanted.

“Maybe one day you will succeed.” Will murmurs as their lips part. “You've stripped everything from me before.”

Hannibal looks down at Will, fond and dangerous.

“Yes.” He coos, voice soft and coaxing. “But I never leave.”

No.

Will thinks, closing his eyes, breathing in Hannibal's scent.

The devil never leaves you.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long space between chapters. My job has been crazy the past month with lots of travel and for some reason I can't write angsty Hannigram sexual tension on a plane with middle aged professionals looking over my shoulder (I wonder why). Unfortunately I will be doing more traveling over the next month and then my work life will settle down. So yeah, the next chapter might take another month but after that posting should pick back up.

As always if you are enjoying please Please PLEASE comment! Feedback means the world to me and I get so inspired by your comments. I legit sit here and obsessively

reread your comments like a total nerd. They inspire me to get these chapters written as quickly as possible!

Finally if you want to shoot the breeze online, ask questions, or read snippets of chapters as I write them I am <http://lovelylaceandlilac.tumblr.com/> on tumblr. My ask box is always open and I love meeting new fannibals! Seriously, ask Gwilbers. I will obsess over how perfect Hugh Dancy's face is and then make lame cannibal puns for hours.

Ô mort! quand viendras - tu m'abriter sous ton aile?

Chapter Summary

What if swallowing Abigail's ear wasn't the only memory Hannibal buried?

“You hope to entice me with a coiffured hair and a pressed shirt.” Hannibal's voice is a sibilant sigh, the echo of a serpent in the garden long ago. “But the niceties of Man pale before the passions of Nature.”

Will shudders as the doctor's fingers ghost down his neck.

“Remember, mon précieux,” Hannibal intones darkly, “that when an wolf seeks to seduce they offer their throat.”

Chapter Notes

Maledetto sia l'istante
che di te, sì che di te mi rese amante,
stirpe iniqua, abominata,
io dovea da te fuggir,
abominata, maledetta,
io dovea da te fuggir.

Accursed be the moment,
when I first fell in love with you,
evil, abominable brood,
I should have fled from you,
abominable, accursed,
I should have fled from you.

~ Edgardo, La Lucia di Lammermoor

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter 6

The curtains part. Red velvet cleaved in two like muscle cut beneath a surgeons blade.

An old man sits at a table, wizened and weary. Behind him are rows upon rows of books and vials. A massive telescope sits in the corner beneath gothic arches and the purple night's sky. He resembles a forlorn wizard, some fantastic merger of Leonardo Di Vinci and Darwin, contemplating life's mysteries in twilight's thrall.

There is a sharp knock, three men at the door with a casket. They leave the box like a package. A delivery placed haphazardly by the door.

The music swells. Will watches as a young woman emerges from the casket, clothed in white, pale as the moon. She raises her arms and dances across the stage, flitting around the old man like a moth in the gloom. He reaches for her, entranced, before she collapses, dead yet again. The old man howls in anguish, fists raised to the sky.

Will cannot help but smile bitterly. He understands the old man's pain all too well.

Even in theater, the dead stay dead.

~~~~~

“Hey Will.”

Will stares at his phone in mute disbelief. It was past 10 pm. He had just left Hannibal's impromptu dinner and come back to his hotel to settle in for the night when his cell rang. The name 'Alana Bloom' flashing across the screen in jarring white letters.

“I didn't wake you did I?” Alana's voice is hesitant, mistaking Will's mute disbelief for irritation.

“No.” He replies carefully.

“Ah, okay.” Alana pauses. “I know you normally work late when you are on the case.” Another uncertain pause. “How is that going?”

Will scratches the back of his neck and sits stiffly on the edge of the bed, as if the female psychiatrist were liable to barge in his room at any moment.

“Good.” Will endures another awkward stretch of silence before blurting out. “Are you checking in on me?”

The voice on the other end laughs uncomfortably. Will can almost see her wince.

“No,” Will can hear something shuffling in the background. “Hannibal says you are doing fine and I trust his judgement.” The implicit like I don't trust yours hanging unsaid.

“So you've already checked in through him.” Another almost audible wince. “This is just a what – mock social call?” Will's voice is dry and bitter.

“God, I am really botching this aren't I?” Alana gives a melancholy huff. “Yes, I worry about you. Yes I called Hannibal because I worry about you...” Her voice trails off.

Will stares at the hand folded in his lap, not sure where she is going with this and unwilling to help her along.

“I don't like the way we left things.” Her voice is mournful but her words are rushed, and Will isn't sure if he feels relief or resentment.

“You mean where you didn't trust me enough to leave your dog with a murderer?”

Definitely resentment.

“Okay, I deserved that.” Alana's voice sounds irritated, but not quite at Will. “I called to apologize but I am doing a crap job of it.”

Will chooses not to comment.

“I have been enraged at the victim,” Alana sighs, a deep soulful sound. Yet despite the regret that rolls through the receiver in tangible waves all Will can hear is the word victim, a slur that lodges and smarts like a splinter caught under his skin. “I have been blaming the traumatized for fighting instead of breaking.”

This time Will cannot speak.

He wants to scream he is still fighting. Still fighting a fight that he knows, knows in the creases of his fingers and shadows of his skull, will surely break him.

Alana isn't his ally anymore though.

“I felt betrayed by the knife in your hand Will. A better woman would have hated the man who put it there.”

And Will feels something lodge in his chest at that. Because there is no better woman. Just Alana. Just unworthy Will and the demons that surround him.

I've missed you - he wants to say – I've missed having someone believe in my goodness.

But all that comes out is a strangled sound.

“Will.” Alana's voice is soft and she must have heard that bone deep hurt that escaped him. She used to be nothing if not sympathetic. “I'm so sorry.”

Will screws his eyes shut and hunches over his knees.

Everything was so unfair.

“Thank you.” He offers limply. Because anything else he could possibly say would betray the wounds he still feels.

“I want to be friends again.” And the way she says friends is carefully emphatic. Like Will is in danger of running into her arms and trying to kiss her again.

He is broken enough to know better this time.

Will nods once before croaking out. “Yeah.”

Will can feel her relieved smile and something close to longing curls in his gut. Not for Alana exactly, but for the man he used to be. A version of him not yet dark enough to consider himself beyond her grasp.

“We have all been wounded by Chilton.” Her voice is so soothing and he wants to believe in her comfort. In her capacity to offer it. “But we can move past this and heal.”

Will agrees, even as he knows it is blatantly untrue.

Alana may heal.

She hasn't sought solace in the Ripper's arms.

~~~~~

The light's of the Washington Hilton had a faint pinkish hue. It cast a youthful rosy glow to all the woman in attendance. Will distantly wondered how many market researchers the Hilton paid to determine political galas would choose conference spaces where their paramour's looked best.

It appeared doctors were equally vain in selecting venues.

Will stood awkwardly next to a table laden with coffee makers, fumbling with a sugar packet and resolutely avoiding eye contact. Discarded pamphlets with the title 'ISBS - 3rd International Stress and Behavior Neuroscience and Biopsychiatry Conference' lay scattered around the table. Will wondered distantly why they bothered printing itineraries anymore – the whole conference schedule was probably already keyed in on everyone's smart phone.

“Graham!” Will looked up like a deer in the headlights, caught by the approaching cluster of people headed his way. They were being lead by Dr. Ingles, a fellow professor at Quantico and a shameless sycophant. Ingles had the look of a man determine to engage, a rooster posturing for the flock behind his back.

Department chair be damned. Next conference Will was sending a trainee in his stead.

“I didn't expect to see you here. Bit social for your solitary tastes, no?” Ingles cocked his head as if they were friends, as if the empath's antisocial personality was a joke between them.

Will glared, mentally willing the man to go away.

“Are you heading to Séjourné and Chabrol's panel on reevaluating enuresis as early indicators of psychopathy?” Dr. Ingle's cheeks were red as he spoke, flushed with manic glee and chronic rosacea. The move from California to Virginia two years ago had not done the middle aged man any favors. “They say he's got quite the findings.”

Will scoffed, unable to resist the bait. “The MacDonald Triad is bullshit. I don't know how that urban legend is still getting grant money.”

Dr. Ingles gave a shrill laugh and clapped Will on the shoulder. “Mr. Graham here is the best and brightest at the academy. If only we could pry his mind for the conference's source material!”

“Do they let those without the laurels of doctorates behind their sacred podium?” Will snarked. Quantico was a far cry from the academic jockeying that congregated at these conferences. The types who had hard ons for Bayesian Qualitative Methodology and dismissed case studies as causality dinosaurs in the big data era.

If case studies were dinosaurs Will's empathy was witchcraft. Subjective, empirically untestable, and not to be trusted.

“Oh they would make an exception for you Mr. Graham.” Dr Ingles eye's glittered with ill humor. “Celebrities always get special treatment.”

A balding man next to Ingles narrowed his eyes in recognition. Will braced himself for what was surely coming.

“Will Graham?” Dr. Ingles nodded enthusiastically as a murmur ran through the crowd behind him. That right there was why Will did not attend psychiatric conferences. “You are quite the topic of conversation in many circles.”

Will glowered, refusing to let his shoulders hunch. “Glad to hear your circles have nothing better to talk about.”

“Oh, I disagree.” The balding man smiled, something rancid and sweet. “Everyone loves a good mystery, especially when that mystery has such a striking parlor trick.”

Will grit his teeth. He could feel the press of their curiosity, the insistent buzz, like children chattering against the glass at the zoo.

“I hate to interrupt gentleman.” A slim brunette with bright blue eyes side stepped the group. “But I need to get to Rodger and Leeuwen's panel on Sadistic personality traits and juvenile delinquency. Mr. Graham, do you know the way to conference room C-2A?”

Will nodded. “I'll show you.” He muttered, keeping his eyes down cast as he moved towards the door, eager for an excuse to leave the others.

Once they were outside Will pointed down the hallway. “Go straight down, two lefts, first door on the right.” He kept his eyes lowered at the red and grey geometric carpet, mentally willing the day to be over.

The woman sighed. Will looked up over her shoulder at the sound.

“Doctor Alana Bloom.” She gave a gentle smile, not dissimilar to how one might approach a shy child. “Binnings is a prick.”

Will could feel her careful kindness. She knew who he was, it was evident in her posture. There was pity, yes, but also a determination not to prod him. The wary space you might give a traumatized animal, no matter how much you wanted to pet it. Her aura broadcast a deep affection for the broken, a lifetime devoted to rescuing them.

Will felt longing stab through him, so sudden and deep he couldn't breathe. In that moment she was both terrible and beautiful.

“Have a nice day.” He mumbled, averting his gaze and stumbling down the hall.

Will knew he was starved for compassion, not charity.

Loneliness made it easy to conflate the two.

~~~~~

“I didn't know you smoked?”

Zeller looks up from where Will has caught him outside, huddle in a small alcove between the hotel vending machine and the ice maker. A light drizzle is coming down. Zeller's coat collar is turned up against the pre-dawn rain as he vapes. They are too far South for snow.

“What are you doing out here?” Zeller mutters.

Will holds up his ice bucket in answer. Truthfully he had just woken from another nightmare and wanted some fresh air and ice for some water.

Last night he dreamed of Alana, of taking her forgiveness and carving out her heart with bloody hands. He woke up screaming. The undershirt beneath his jacket is still soaked through, but the antagonistic forensics agent didn't need to know that.

“That mess will give you popcorn lung.” Will nods, leaning against the ice maker.

“Better than lung cancer.” Zeller narrows his eyes. “Besides I'm trying to quit.”

“Harder than you thought?” Will cracks a wry smile.

“That's an understatement.” Zeller mutters sullenly. “You smoke?”

“When I was a teenager. Everyone did.” Will shrugs. “Quit when I was a cop.”

Zeller nods and inhales again. "Never knew a lot of cops that smoked."

"They make it a hard habit to keep." Will sighs. He misses it sometimes, even though he knows he shouldn't. "You can't smoke in the patrol cars, near the building, or while interacting with civilians. Inconvenient to be craving a cigarette while on duty."

"They did you a favor." Zeller looks at Will sourly if he is resigned to the man's company by court order. He grunts before gazing off into the parking lot, eyes distant. "My dad smoked. It was probably inevitable with me."

Will wonders if this is Zeller's attempt at making nice. After Alana's call last night there must be something in the water. He follows the man's gaze, reluctant to comment on his own childhood but sensing the olive branch being offered. Torn by the impulse to refuse it out of spite.

"Same." Will relents, frowning. "Nothing is inevitable though."

"I never pegged you for an optimist." Zeller turns his head back to Will, his eyebrows knotting together in a tangle of creases. His voice sounds a hair warmer and Will is faced again with the choice of how much to reveal.

Just what is he projecting lately that the people who once blamed him are overcome with guilt and pity?

"I need to believe in my own agency," Will begins slowly. The words are heavy and hard to form.

Zeller gives a long stare. The silence stretches between them.

"After everything that has happened." Zeller finishes.

Will looks away, pausing before finally nodding once.

Zeller swears bitterly and pockets his vaporizer, turning his back to the parking lot. “I still want to hate you.”

“I know.”

“Of all the people to drag in your mess, it had to be her.”

Will looks up sharply. “She wasn't just your friend.”

“Yeah, but being yours got her killed.” Zeller pops his coat collar up further with agitated fingers.

“Going after the Chesapeake Ripper got her killed.” Will's voice is low and tight. “If you had only listened-”

“I know, I know.” Zeller snaps. “Look I'll get over it. Because I have to. Because it's not really you I'm mad at. And because she wouldn't want me to blame you.”

Will can only stare.

It was as close to an apology as he is going to get. Alana's was more heartfelt.

Gentle words are easier from gentle people though.

“Your attitude hardly makes it a walk in the park.” Zeller amends, jabbing his hands in his pockets.

Will can't think of anything in response. He doesn't make himself approachable, he knows this and is unwilling to change. The last time he truly opened up to someone the person ended up framing him for murder.

Lesson learned.

Still, he craves what Alana offers.

Everyone wants to be seen as good. Salvageable. If Will is selfish to still cling to that – well, it is hardly the least disturbing aspect of himself to be recently uncovered.

He wonders though if the world has left him too jaded to appreciate the benefit of Zeller's uneasy truce. He discarded friendship when Beverly came to visit his cell to solve a crime. And she was closer than Zeller could ever be.

Silence fills the cramped space between them again.

Their phones go off simultaneously.

Zeller fishes his out first, the blue glow of the screen illuminating his face's deep set frown lines.

“It's Jack.” His voice is offhand, as if their uncle had just texted something as banal as directions to the family reunion. “We've got two more bodies. I've got to go. Meet us there in a few hours. You know the drill.” Zeller punches the air in mock enthusiasm. “Let's catch ourselves a killer!”

“Yeah, okay.” Will does not stiffen as Zeller playfully jabs his shoulder. Instead he fakes a friendly smile.

Let's catch ourselves a killer.

Will doesn't need friends. They are emotional liabilities and he is at war.

But allies?

Allies he can use.

~~~~~

Will's father was a card shark.

Not in the glamorized way of Hollywood, with a gambling addiction and fast loans that landed a family destitute. When his father bothered to bet it was never high and never borrowed. Jim Bean and Malboro Reds drained the bank faster than a poorly dealt hand in the Graham household. Lee was in it for the fun, nothing else.

Gin Rummy, Spades, Poker, Hearts, Canasta; sometimes Will could hear them late at night around folding tables on the front porch – hot sticky summers with the window open, the acerbic smell of cigarettes and the faint sound of laughter drifting in his room.

On Sunday's when Will was young they would play Spite and Malice in the kitchen. His father would shuffle two decks together and Will would climb up on his chair and wait for the board to form. His father liked it because the long games were equal parts luck and strategy. Will liked it because it was the only game where his father's penchant to count cards was worthless.

“Don't hesitate to be vicious.” His father would say, often before indulging in a five minute spree of running off the center and until his discards were depleted and his payoff pile obnoxiously low. “It got it's name for a reason.”

The games would stretch eternally long. Will would watch the cards pile up in runs, alternating colors irreverent of suite from Aces to Queens lined up in rows of four. They were like unbound books, their layers containing endless permutations of hopes and strategies. When the center reached four rows of Kings Lee would sweep them away and reintroduce the discards back in the stack, the sharp snap and arc of red as they shuffled and bridged between callous fingers. The stacks would rise and fall, waiting as the clock ticked by for someone to win.

It was his way of passing on a legacy. Will knew without being told. Knew it in the same quiet spaces and reverent motions of fishing in stream, the muddy water cold around their legs and sun upon their cheeks.

Lee's father had taught him, his grandfather before him. “They used to play in it the trenches in World War I,” he would whisper at the kitchen table, voice hushed with a conspiratorial tone. “English and French in ditches, playing runs and waiting for death. Called it Cat and Mouse.”

Will would sort his discards with deliberate fingers, feeling the worn edges as he slowly built his arsenal.

“Competitive patience.” Will's father would grin, turning his last payoff card over with excruciating slowness. “When you're the cat you can afford to wait.”

~~~~~

The address is a colonial style mansion off Phar Road in Buckhead. Pure white towering columns line the exterior like the Parthenon. Vaulted windows look out to trimmed beds of azaleas and neatly manicured grounds full of crepe myrtles and towering magnolia. It was the picture of Southern excess. Evocative of long gone estates and the scent of old money.

An old, bone deep, bitter edge in Will wonders how many immigrant laborers tended to the lawns and cleaned the rooms, rough callouses and whispers of Spanish in the soft white man's kingdom.

He files up the master stairwell, brushing past agents dusting and photographing everything in sight. Portraits and framed pictures line the hallway walls like windows; masculine ships, rolling English countryside, and a young woman with a spaniel staring forlorn behind a curtain of dogwood blooms.

Will thinks she looks haunted.

The couple is in the master bedroom surrounded by a team of at least eight agents taking pictures and gathering samples. A sprawling space with a sitting room, double fireplace, and vaulted tray ceiling to frame the kingsize bed flanked by white columns. The duvet of sage green and gold is stained dark red, both bodies embracing each other on a bed of cream rose petals.

Both bodies are naked, facing each other on their sides, their hips joining together in undulating V, fingers interlaced and bloody. Sprawled out like lovers in a garden, framed by the green and golden vines of the damask beneath them.

“I think our killer only targets lovers with highly paid interior designers.” Price quips, photographing the bouquet of eyes and hearts on the bedside table. They are nestled amidst magnolias, succulent, ranculus, azalea blooms, and white roses. The whites, cream, and soft greens echoing the décor of the master suite.

“This could be a scene from Southern Living.” Zeller agrees, swabbing the twin champagne flutes by the bed.

“I wasn't aware Southern Living featured gruesome forensics?” Price sniggers.

“The *decorating*, not the bodies.” Zeller groans.

“Yeah, the murdered sugar daddy angle is probably too controversial for their austere readership anyways.” Price laughs, moving to snap photos of the bed. “Hits a little too close to home.”

Will looks at the couple again. The frantic snap of agents photographing every inch of the room echoes in his skull.

The man is far older, in his fifties at least. He is in good shape, but the grey dusting of chest hair and the wrinkles on his hands give his age away. The wife appears to be in her early twenties.

Will slowly circles the bed.

The blood on her face makes it difficult to tell, but Will is struck with the certainty she is the same sad face that had stared out from the portrait of the dogwoods.

“The rich always snag the best tail.” Zeller is still chattering idly to Price in the background. “When you got dough you can afford the string of ex missus.”

“Ohhhhh was this the upgraded model?” Price's eyes gleam conspiratorially.

“Did you not read the preliminary report?” Will interjects, paying attention to the two once more.

“I skimmed the notes on the way over.” Price holds up his camera as if it was a shield. “I had to grab breakfast.”

“This was technically the Baugher's wedding night.” Will scrubs his hand through his hair and sighs. It's really not his job to fill Price in. But the morning truce with Zeller has him feeling he ought to try a little harder with his co-workers. “Third wife. He ditched the first two along with the kids. Newlyweds had tickets to fly out to the Amalfi Coast today.

Sister in-law was supposed to drive them to the airport. She found them this morning. Rigor mortis suggests that they were killed last night.”

“Kind of her to find them before they started to smell.” Price nods agreeably, as if the older crime scenes featured decomposition just to spite him.

“Yeah, I appreciate the current scent of *Eau de blood and magnolias*.” Zeller scoops the air in front of his face for emphasis. “Compliments the décor.”

“Better than Steel Magno-” Price begins before snagging his foot on the bed skirt and falling face first on the carpet.

“That what you get for insulting a classic.” Zeller sniggers.

“I swear you will watch anything with Julia Rob-” Price is reaching under the bed to retrieve his camera when his expression changes. “Why hello there.” Price murmurs as he lifts the bed skirt. “Hey, come look what I found.”

Will and Zeller crouch down to see what Price is pointing at.

There is a quiver of broken arrows shoved halfway under the bed.

“Cupid Killer is living up to his name.” Price is chuckling with what sounds suspiciously like approval.

“Is that what they are calling him now?” Will stares at the arrows, something nagging the back of his mind.

“Yeah, Atlanta Journal Constitution gets the credit for the moniker. They printed it front page, big bold letters,” Price sits up, holding up his hands as if gesticulating headlines, **“When Love is to Die for – The Terror of the Cupid Killer.”**

Will steps back as an unfamiliar agent moves forward to mark the spot and bag the evidence. On closer inspection the arrows look like the kind one might find in a theater production instead of a sporting goods store. Classically shaped, more aesthetic than practical.

Will's thoughts drift back to the picture on the stairwell, the sad young new trophy wife.

“Psyche was the beautiful but sad young bride of Cupid.” Will says the words slowly, as if testing the taste of his thoughts. “She consummated her marriage in total darkness. She was forbidden to look upon her husband's face, for it was prophesied she had married a monster so terrible he destroyed gods and men alike.”

“Both Cupid and Psyche injured themselves upon Cupid's arrows.” Price follows Will's gaze. “Were these broken lovers?”

“Perhaps. It depends on whether Cupid is one of the victims or the killer himself.” Will frowns.

“So you're telling me we might need to revise our criminal profile to look for a modern day Cupid?” Zeller looked impatient. He was always unappreciative of the more philosophical killers. If the man had his way only literalists and engineers would commit murder. “Who would that even be? A chubby cherub faced archery enthusiast?”

“More like the fat guy in a diaper hitting on everyone at the garden party.” Price laughs, extending a hand to be helped up.

“What kind of garden parties do you go to?” Zeller exclaims as he pulls his friend to his feet.

“Is this a soiree or a crime scene ladies?” Jack barks out as he walks in the room, Hannibal trailing silently behind him. “Will what do we have?”

“I don't know.” Will mutters, resenting the sea of faces that had stopped what they were doing to stare at him. “Haven't had a chance to look yet.”

“Well are we going to chat about garden parties or are we going to let Will do his *goddamned job*?” Jack bellows and motions to the door. “Everybody out!”

Price shrugs, Zeller gives an only mildly irritated stare, and everyone else scatters. Everyone except Hannibal who lingers by the door, his indifferent posture at odds with the intensity of the look he was currently aiming at Will.

“Are you staying?” Will frowns at the doctor. He can feel the man's eyes on the back of his skull, trailing down his spine like a physical touch.

Hannibal raises an eyebrow as if asking for permission. Will is opening his mouth to object when Jack interrupts.

“You were white as a sheet after last time.” Jack waves a dismissive hand on the way out. “Keep him here.”

Will sighs and removes his glasses. He steps back six paces until he is in the center of the room and closes his eyes.

When he opens them the pendulum is slicing through the room in a beam of yellow, erasing blood and bodies. Erasing death and despair until only the bed of green and gold remains, framed by white columns and scattered rose petals.

Will shivers, for this is his wedding night.

*The monster is standing behind him, a black shadow in the darkened room, the gruesome groom come to claim death's bride. For Will is Psyche and his veil is a funeral shroud, cold and cursed.*

*“Desiderio delle tue mani chiare.” The lilt of a familiar accent whispers around him as the shadow pushes him down, as they writhe on the bed, on the night's field of green and gold, vines holding Will's arms and flowers in his hair. And Will trembles at the press of fingers, at the darkness that lifts his gown and laves his throat. “S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento?”*

*And Will is the sacrifice, shimmering and pale as unseen hands part his thighs and brush his hips, feathered touches that brand and burn. The demon is opening him, first with fingers and then the sharp press of skin, hot and hard piercing him, impaling him like an arrow.*

*And Will is shot, joined with death and throbbing open and sweet. He trembles and moans and the shadow thrusts inside, sinking teeth into his wanton skin. And he is insatiable and hungry, spreading himself wide, wrapping his legs around his nightmare and pulling him deeper still.*

*“Will” The Reaper whispers, and his words are the serpent's hiss, breathing fire against his throat. Breathing fire in his loins.*

*And it's too much to take. Too much too feel.*

*“Will”*

*And he is breaking apart and being split in two, consumed and cherished. Defiled and destroyed.*

**“WILL”**

Jack Crawford's voice cracks like thunder and he is back at the crime scene, shaking, dazed, and painfully aroused. Hannibal is slowly moving towards Will's right. His head is tilted, hand outstretched as one would approach a feral animal.

Will is suddenly grateful for the oversized FBI jacket hiding the outline of his insistent erection.

“We did not mean to startle you. You were beginning to hyperventilate and I feared-” Hannibal stops once he is within arms reach, nostrils flaring. His eyes suddenly grow dark and his hand shoots forward, gripping Will's shoulder in a vice.

Will freezes, searching Hannibal's face as his heart hammers impossibly fast.

“Must have been a nasty one to rattle you.” Jack prompts from the doorway, gruff and impatient. “What is the killer's MO?”

“Yes, Will,” Hannibal's voice has dropped impossibly low as he leans forward. “What did you see?”

*He knows I'm aroused.*

Will wrenches free of Hannibal's grasp and turns sharply towards Jack. He bends forward slightly, praying the jacket will continue to cover him.

“I-I couldn't see.” Will acknowledges.

“What?” Jack's voice has a dangerous edge, as if he were a father readying the belt.

Will looks around frantically, trying to read the crime scene for something. *Anything.*

“The killer drugged the champagne and waited in the master bath, watching them. They were having sex when the rohypnol took hold.”

“We can tell that from the last two.” Jack growls.

“I can't see the killer, Jack”

“Well what the hell did you see?” Jack's voice is deceptively low, as if he is saving the yelling for whatever he needs to bully Will into next. “You've been in here zoned out for the past fifteen goddamn minutes.”

Will closes his eyes and clenches his fists, willing the deduction forth through grit teeth and sheer determination.

“The bed is important. The wedding night is important.” Will's breathing is uneven and his heart won't slow down. “The sex is important. The act, the *consummation*. Something about them, about the victims and the act – I'm trying but I just have fragments. I can't see what they truly are. How they look to him.”

“Is it possible the victims are not being chosen at random?” Hannibal interjects.

“No.” Will agrees. “They are being killed for something they are doing...or not doing. They are both the reason for the murder and the symbolism behind the act.”

“Then perhaps we are approaching this wrong.” Hannibal's tone is thoughtful, as if his only desire in the world were to help. “You have been trying to see the killer when perhaps you should be trying to see the victims. The chosen muses that so inspire the artist's brush.”

Jack purses his lips in consideration.

Will feels the hairs on the back of his neck prickle.

“Empathizing with the victims is never helpful. Their last moments tell us nothing. They are always the same,” Will's voice is halting and frustrated, “full of fear and terror.”

“Perhaps not their last moments then, but how they were before. Who they were before. When the killer gazed upon them and decided their lives must be taken. The inspiration behind a painting tells us a great deal about it's subsequent interpretation.”

Hannibal sounds so poised and reasonable next to Will's inarticulate fumbling. In the background Jack is slowly nodding.

“If I could empathize with them from reading sheets of paper about their lives I would have done it already. All paper gives me are impressions.” Will frowns. He isn't sure what Hannibal is pushing at but it cannot be in his best interest. “I have to walk in their shoes and dwell in the spaces they occupied during a pivotal moment in order to recreate the thinking.”

“Would it help to lie on the bed?”

Hannibal's suggestion rings out, innocuous and damning.

Will feels time falter and his heart stop.

“What?” He turns to Hannibal slowly. His voice distant and mind alarmingly blank.

“The Angel Maker – you told me once it helped you see through the killer's eyes to lay where he laid.” Hannibal's voice is so smooth, so authoritative and professional. Will can already hear Jack's gears turning. “Perhaps it will help you see the true nature of the victims, to see what the Cupid saw as he watched them. To lie where time stilled and fate closed in.”

A million rebuttals race through his head as Will struggles to articulate why that is insane. But he is trapped. Suspended between the knowledge of Hannibal's true identity and the

inability use it as a counterargument.

“We just established their last moments on the bed were full of terror.” Will begins slowly.  
“Reliving that fear won't tell me who they were.”

“The bed is not just the place of their deaths but the place of their marriage. A pivotal moment. Some would say the most pivotal. And one that you said our killer watched from the shadows.” Hannibal's speaks as if he as trying to persuade Will to see reason and not engage in a form of morbid empathetic voyeurism. “How we express intimacy is a portrait of our innermost self. There may be something yet to uncover.”

Jack walks towards the bed, eyes narrowed. Will can see the very moment the idea seizes whole.

“Doctor Lector may be right.”

“All I am going to see is sex.” Will feels like he is watching the conversation through a window, like he is the only one who can see how ridiculous this is. “That doesn't tell us anything.”

“You just said yourself that something the Cupid sees in them is important. Not just sex or love. How he is choosing them. And that this bed and the act that took place here is an important part of the killers thinking and motivation.” Jack speaks as if Will is too dumb to remember his own deductions. “Any lead is a good lead.”

“The victims,” Will shakes his head.

He has empathized enough with the victims lately without actively trying. He refuses to plunge headfirst into a mixture of sex and death while lying next to corpses. It's so beyond reasonable he can hardly articulate why.

“They are-I can't lie next to-”

“Not now.” Jack is already pulling out his cell and tapping out instructions. “Tonight. Once we move them to the lab.”

Will takes a deep breath and tries again.

“What if I loose myself again? You saw what happened earlier.” Will seizes upon the memory of Beth Lebou, of Jack's reputation. “What if I contaminant the crime scene?”

“We will put down a tarp and Doctor Lector will be here to bring you out of it.” Jack glances up and the doctor nods in confirmation.

“Hannibal cannot be here.” Will fights to keep his voice from raising, from showing any of the panic that races through his veins.

Whatever Hannibal hopes to gain from this, whatever he is plotting, it is a new low.

“You've already proved you can enter the state with him in the room. We may bend rules for results but every good plan has a failsafe.” Jack tilts his head in Hannibal's direction. “Lector is yours. Both of you come after 9 pm. It's been arranged.”

“Jack-” Will's voice hitches, and he realizes he's about to beg. Part of him, he realizes with disgust, is okay with groveling if it spares him from this.

“Will” Jack's voice takes on a paternal edge. One full of steel and earth. The bedrock Jack is always claiming to be. “I believe in you. You are saving lives.”

Jack doesn't bother looking up to see the impact of the bomb he just dropped. The head of the BAU simply turns and exits the room, giving the agents lingering outside the all's clear.

Hannibal stays behind, watching Will with thinly suppressed satisfaction. The right corner of his mouth quirking in the ghost of a smile.

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The opera music swells. Hannibal sits carved and transfixed, his eyes burning into the figure on the stage with an unholy fire.

“Life has drained him of his vitality, his dream crushed under the wheels of ignorance and inequity” Hannibal's voice snares Will, a hook of wire around the fragile skin of his throat. Hannibal is still in the gloom, only the clipped lilt of his sympathy for the tenor in the dark. “The urge to barter flesh for soul a sirens' call on a depreciating asset.”

Ô mort! quand viendras – tu

m'abriter sous ton aile?

“Oh death,” Will looks up as Hannibal's voice thrums in excitement, translation unfolding in the dark, “*when will you come to shelter me under your wings?*”

Will watches Faust beat his chest, bone white arms draped in velvet and sagging flesh, folded skin flailing against the inevitability of age, the betrayal of a body worn by friction and decay.

Eh, bien,

“Well then,” Hannibal sighs, piquant and supple in the undercurrent of the inevitable. His hand grips Will's elbow with oppressive swiftness, sudden and violating.

puisque la mort me fuit

“since death flees from me,” Hannibal's head rears back, his eyes black and teeth bared. He grab's Will's chin in a vice and pulls him towards his terrible visage.

pouquoi n'irais-je pas vers elle?

“Why don't I go toward her?”

Will does not flinch from the embrace.

The kiss l'appel du vide.

Translations:

Desiderio delle tue mani chiare - Desire of your hands bright

S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento? - What do I feel if this is not love?

Chapter End Notes

I don't know if this is familiar to any of you, but while watching the new Interview with a Vampire series I was filled with such a visceral nostalgia and longing for the Hannibal fandom, for our wacky cannibal murder husband cannon. This fandom was such an integral and beloved part of my life. I missed my past writing, and this fandom like hell.

The muse bites back and then Murder husbands just won't let go.

Cruda, funesta smania tu m'hai svegliata in petto!

Chapter Summary

What if swallowing Abigail's ear wasn't the only memory Hannibal buried?

“You hope to entice me with a coiffured hair and a pressed shirt.” Hannibal's voice is a sibilant sigh, the echo of a serpent in the garden long ago. “But the niceties of Man pale before the passions of Nature.”

Will shudders as the doctor's fingers ghost down his neck.

“Remember, mon précieux,” Hannibal intones darkly, “that when an wolf seeks to seduce they offer their throat.”

Chapter Notes

No, contenerti un cor non può,
no, non può!

No, it is more than human heart
can bear!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter 7

Faust's voice cried out from the black of the stage, an old man split with the lines of regret and inequity, the visage of humanity wrecked and stricken, rotted and grasping beyond the veil of vanity and flesh.

Everything and everyone turned to ash and memories, the hope and dreams of youth gutted by frailty and failure.

His teeth split back and a poisoned cry cracks the stage, the howl of desperation and damnation.

Maudit soit le bonheur!

Damned be happiness!

Will feels Hannibal at his periphery in the gloom, insubstantial and terrible.

Maudites, la science, la prière et la foi!

Damned, science, prayer and faith!

His hand clasped on his left shoulder, fingers hooked sharply beneath his collar bone, collared and burnt.

Faust screams in agony, rent with disgust and desire.

Mautite sois-tu, patience!

May you be damned, patience!

He cries to perdition, screams his passion to the reaper's embrace, the kiss of bone and oblivion.

A promise for the perfume of grave dirt, a marriage inked in death and denial.

A moi, Satan! à moi!

Come to me, Satan! Come to me !

~~~~~

Will takes an Uber to the mansion later that night.

He is furious the entire ride.

Furious at Jack for his ruthless pragmatism. For Jack had weighed the situation, and regardless of whether he viewed Lector's suggestion as an opportunity for a new lead or pandering towards the most depraved honeypot sting in existence, Will was the chosen tool to use. Pimping Will on the bed of a murder scene with Hannibal in tow might catch Jack a killer.

Which killer was inconsequential.

Will thanks the driver and slams the car door with all the petulance of a child. He resents the dead Baughers and their smooth driveway and well manicured lawn as he stomps towards the house – desperately wishing for a rock to kick or kudzu to rip to vent his anger. His bone deep loathing that here, over a year and one mental break and incarceration later, all Jack had to do was play the 'saving lives' card and Will came to heel. Because Jack isn't the real problem. Not really. It is Will's inability to say 'No' to this job and all the trauma that comes with it.

Will circles the house, looking for the side entrance where the spare key has been left when he spots a black Lexus parked further back across from the guest house. It has rental plates.

He grits his teeth. Hannibal is already here.

He scowls as he lets himself in the empty mansion and begins up the stairs, venomous thoughts shifting to a new target.

If Will was the fuel in his own perpetual motion machine of life ruining choices then Hannibal was the accelerant.

He pauses outside the bedroom door, hand hovering over the knob. Hannibal was the real reason he was in this mess. He had seen the doctor's face before, sharp and ravenous.

Will doesn't know how much Hannibal suspected at the crime scene, what he even suspected, but whatever it was it had given way to scheming. It didn't matter what Hannibal was hoping to achieve tonight. Will was certain of one thing.

He shouldn't give it to him.

Will opens the door and walks inside.

The lights are out but the gas fireplace is lit, casting the room in warm hues and shifting shadows. The doctor had pulled a chaise lounge by the bed and was sitting comfortably, sketching something while he waited. A clear tarp covered the bed. It did nothing to hide the dried stain of blood spread across the center like a gaping black hole.

Hannibal looks up at Will's approach, his features arranging themselves into something professional yet warm. His sleeves are rolled up and his tie is gone, his jacket neatly draped over the head of the chaise.

The state of undress in the firelight suggests a prelude to intimacy that makes Will's stomach clinch.

“Hello, Will.” The doctor's voice is clipped and brusque. “I am pleased you decided to come.”

“Oh I'm sure you are getting a kick out of this.” Will stands a few paces away, unwilling to move any closer. “Once you planted the idea in Jack you knew damn well he would have my head if I refused.”

“I had believed it would prove therapeutic.” Hannibal sets his drawing aside with deliberate fingers. “I still do.”

Will gives a derisive snort. “What part of this is supposed to be therapeutic?”

Hannibal cocks his head like an inquiring bird of prey; powerfully lethal yet occasionally moved by curiosity instead of hunger.

“You have been unable to see this killer.”

“Empathy is not a guarantee.”

“You were able to empathize with the purity of flowing spring earlier.” Hannibal's expression flickers briefly in the shifting light. “I only wish to help you discover the source of that deep well.”

Will inhales sharply. He stares at the man in the firelight, the patrician curve of his lips, clasped hands free of blood, dead eyes betraying nothing.

*Weep for Psyche. Betrothed to a monster, consummated by shadows.*

“What if I don't want to face the source?” Will crosses his arms, skin prickling. “I see enough horrors. If my mind shut down before isn't that a sign to leave it lie?”

“This is not the first time this has happened?” The doctor's tone suggests he already knows the answer.

*Will can see yellow daffodils, petals enveloping him in swirls of yellow flames. And Hannibal is laying his corpse down, is carving his name into Will's skin over and over again.*

*Beloved.*

“No.” Will's voice is no more than a whisper.

Hannibal nods.

“We can leave now.” Hannibal spreads his hands in a placating gesture. “You need not find the source of these dark waters. But your subconscious is beginning to leak. A ship can only swallow so much of the ocean before it is swallowed in turn. How much worse will it be to continue to look at the work of these killers without the balm of saving lives?”

Will says nothing.

“Remove your coat and lie on the bed.” Hannibal extends his an arm out like a terrible sentinel, shrouded in the gloom, pointing towards the executioner's platform. “Clear your mind and we will begin.”

Will averts his eyes, grasping the the zipper on his jacket and slowly pulling down.

The sound stretches in the stillness of the room and he can feel Hannibal's gaze, dark and intent as Will strips. He is still fully clothed as he toes his shoes off and climbs on the bed, but he feels exposed.

If his body betrays him again there will be no hiding his shame.

Will carefully lies on the clear tarp, sinking into the center of the black stain like a body descending into the void. A man sucked into the mouth of the night.

Hannibal smiles, slow and predatory.

Will closes his eyes.

*He is Psyche, shivering in the marital bed, waiting for the kiss of the serpent.*

“Do you see yourself as you did before?”

*His wedding dress is a funeral shroud, there are Asphodelus in his hair.*

“Yes”

*The blackness caresses him, hungry fingers pressed in trembling flesh, sharpened teeth scrape his skin.*

“What do you see?”

*The serpent breathes against his throat, undulating muscle around him.*

“A marriage to the grave.”

*- How lonely, how lovely- the serpent murmurs, - you smell like winter and taste like stars.-*

“Who are you?”

*There are horns around him, antlers pinning him to a bed of silk and bone.*

“The sacrificial bride.”

*And the nightmare is kissing him, caging his face and crushing his garland of asphodelus beneath tangled curls.*

“At whose alter do you lay?”

*And Will is gasping, crying beneath stroking fingers and a burning tongue.*

“Death and Passion”

*-Precious thing- the shadow whispers, hot and urgent, the cultured lilt of a familiar accent – let me smoothen your grace against the night. -*

“With whom do you lay?”

*And Will is begging -Please.-*

“I....”

*- Hannibal– Will is wanton and moaning as the shroud slips from his face and he recognizes his betrothed -Hannibal, please.-*

“With whom do you join?”

*And his nightmare presses between his thighs, pierces him, like an arrow to his core.*

“No.”

Will gasps as his eyes fly open. His is flushed, clenched fists trembling at his sides, arousal hard between his legs. Hannibal is leaned forward on the lounge, a look of ravenous hunger drawn tight across his face.

“I will not feed your sadistic voyeurism on a bed of blood.” Will hisses. “Because you crave to hear me describe that, don't you? My defilement and my death.”

Hannibal's expression shifts. His eyes narrow but the look of hunger and open lust is gone.

The doctor slowly stands and approaches the bed.

“Hannibal--” Will scoots back against the headboard, hearing the tarp beneath him bunch and crackle.

“Tell me, are you aroused right now?”

Will gives a sharp exhale. Hannibal is standing beside the bed, face a mass of flickering shadows and dangerous angles.

“I don't see-”

“Do not lie to me William.”

And the way Hannibal says his full name, sharp and disapproving like his father, it moves through him like a tangible force.

Will looks down and nods.

“And were you before? At the crime scene?”

Will gives a jagged exhale and nods again.

He stares at the black spread beneath him, still unable to meet the doctor's gaze. He wishes the stain would open up and swallow him whole.

He can hear the crackle of the tarp as Hannibal slides into the bed. He feels fingers beneath his chin, and Hannibal is tilting his head up.

“Darling boy,” He murmurs, all honey and sin, “when you closed your eyes, with whom did you lie?”

And Hannibal is pressing against him, guiding Will to lay down, guiding him to sprawl out on the black halo of blood and death. And his hands are on his face and in his hair, stroking tenderly as he kisses him deeply. His body caged above Will in a canopy of sin. And Will is shaking, his form wracked with vibrations.

“With whom did you join?” Hannibal whispers into his mouth.

Will can feel his body respond even as the smell of blood grows stronger. He can hear himself moaning, can hear the echo of the murdered woman moaning, and he feels shameful and unclean.

“Tell me, mon chéri.” Hannibal urges, kissing down his throat.

Will is so hard, so wretched and hard, and as he writhes his hips and turns his head to the side he can see the blackness beneath the tarp. He can smell the sharp metallic tang of blood enveloping his senses. He is lying where corpses lay and Hannibal is striping him, sucking his pulse point and slowly grinding him into the bed, into the evidence of death and mutilation.

“Who haunts your fantasies?”

And Will can feel the murder's footsteps in the room, feel his footsteps in his bones. A killer within him and a killer above him, mirror images kissing him as he falls to pieces on the alter of sin. And Hannibal will make it their bed. He will merge their flesh a midst the scent of death until Will won't be able to tell where Hannibal ends and he begins.

Will cries out, pulling back with the last vestige of self he possesses.

“Stop.”

This is *wrong*.

“I can't.”

Hannibal leans back, regarding Will with an inscrutable expression.

“This is-” Will cries out, sobbing as Hannibal stares down at him. He is flushed with shame and the urge to grind his hips back up and continue. “I can't. This is...I can't.”

Hannibal pauses, gazing at Will as if he part of a marvelous puzzle and he is tasked with where to put the next piece.

Nodding, he leans back on his heels, watching Will sit up with hooded eyes.

“Tell me, Will, what are you feeling?”

“Self loathing.” Will chokes out. He is still desperately hard as he scramble back to the headboard again. He hopes the distance will help.

“For what you are feeling or where you are feeling it?”

“Both.”

Hannibal nods, as if deciding something.

“You feel as if you are doing something wrong.”

“I know I am doing something wrong.”

“But yet you are still aroused.” Hannibal tilts his head. “Of all our monsters it is a that mirror stirs our nightmares most. Do you fear you feel that way because there is something wrong with you?”

Hannibal's voice is low, soothing. The voice of his doctor, of the closest friend and confidant.

The voice of his betrayer.

“Yes.” Will whispered.

“Tell me,” Hannibal's voice is impossibly light for the dread his following words inspire. “What did your father do when you were improper?”

Will can hear his own pulse, thundering hard and steady in throat.

Hannibal's gaze never wavers.

“He would yell. Put me in time out. Ground me.” Will clenches his fist. “He wasn't like that.”

Hannibal nods.

“Did you feel like that was enough?”

Will exhales sharply.

Images of him as a boy, overwhelmed and confused, too much to handle. Never normal, never fixed.

He slowly shakes his head.

Hannibal regards him carefully. It's as if Will's past is written on his skin and the doctor seeks to commit each verse to memory.

The silence stretches between them.

“Tell me, do you want to be punished?”

Will hisses, feeling his heart clench and his hands spasm. He does not know how to answer that question, *cannot* answer that question.

Hannibal allows a slow, wide smile. A crocodile's grin, the white gleam of teeth in the flickering light.

“Sit here, William.” And he is using Will's full name, patting the space on the bed beside him.

And all Will can think of as he moves forward is the Egyptian Plover. Tiny birds that fly into into the crocodile's mouth.

They are never eaten.

“Lean forward, darling boy.” And Hannibal is pulling Will over his lap.

Will flushes, Hannibal's intent suddenly clear.

The thought stirs his cock to half-hardness again.

“Bare your bottom, please.”

Will feels his fingers move in a daze, lifting his hips up to fumble with his fly and move his pants and boxers down to his knees. The cold air caresses his skin, his ass arched in the air. His cock grows heavy against Hannibal's thigh.

“Very good.” Hannibal murmurs, and Will has to duck his head against the tarp to hide the flush the praise creates.

The first slap whistles through the room. It lands against his right cheek with a loud crack that echoes and stings.

The sensation resonates with something tucked deep within. Will feels an tremor quake throughout his body, a innate tightness come unfurled in a rush of pleasure.

It feels right.

“Do you wonder why you envision yourself as the bride?”

Will sputters at the doctor's word, gasping as his silence grants him a second slap in the same spot. Hannibal's hands are large and Will shudders beneath the force of the blow.

He shouldn't be enjoying this.

“You could not see yourself as the killer but instead identify with the female victim.” Hannibal continues as he spansks him again.

Will cries out, impossibly embarrassed, now fully erect, bobbing with every blow.

“The lonely virgin, trembling as she found pleasure in the arms of a much older, wealthier man.” Hannibal's tone is mildly scolding.

His large hand lands with another sharp smack. The slap brushes Will's erection against Hannibal's leg and he shudders, hoping the doctor will not notice as he tilts his hips down to increase the friction.

“I-” Will groans. He isn't sure what he means to say. He just feels want and ache and endless shame.

Hannibal hits him again in the same spot. Again and again until the skin throbs and Will is moaning. Groaning and burying his face further into the tarp, blackness spread beneath him and the scent of blood in his head.

“Are you untouched like her?” Hannibal's voice drops impossibly low. Will feels his cheeks being spread, feels the warm press of a finger brushing against his puckered hole. “Do you crave to be breached, to be *penetrated and undone*?”

Will's mind fizzles white at the words even as his ass arches up, greedy and wanting.

Hannibal pulls back and smacks him again.

“You don't deserve that yet.” Hannibal reprimands, voice sharp and scolding. “You've been a very bad boy.”

Yes.

The words echo deep inside and Will feels an almost cathartic rush, a feedback loop of mild pain and shame with pleasure.

He deserves this.

He deserves this and so much worse.

Another slap echoes and Will is beyond himself.

“Please.” He is gasping, writhing against the sting on his backside and the glorious friction against his painful erection. He can feel the pleasure of his humiliation radiating from Hannibal. How he must look flushed and hard with his ass in the air, squirming and begging like a truant youth. Hannibal savored every slap and Will savored them in turn. “Please, I need-please-”

Hannibal smacks him twice more before pausing, fingers drifting over the angry red flesh in a tender motion. The touch is somehow more painful than all the previous hits combined. “What do you need, dear William?”

And Will is arching against Hannibal, desperate for release, for punishment, for forgiveness. Anything and everything.

“I need to come.” Will begs, rutting shamelessly against Hannibal's leg. “Please let me come.”

Hannibal makes a shushing sound, reaching beneath Will to pump him. Will is fucking into Hannibal's fist, snapping his hips forward again and again as he feels his orgasm building from deep within.

And Will can feel the beginning of blessed relief, feel his body tense like a loaded spring. And he arches his back and stiffens, groaning in pleasure, when Hannibal suddenly slides his hand down and pinches the base of his cock

Will feels his entire body shudder and clench, his orgasm sputtering out, forcefully repressed like a physical blow. He can see stars behind his eyes and his groin throbs angry like an open nerve.

“You can come when you are a good boy.” Hannibal tuts, pulling Will's pants back up and rubbing soothing circles on his back.

Will sobs out, unfulfilled yet somehow spent. Emotionally drained and burdened with the knowledge that after punishing him Will would have begged to suck Hannibal had he asked. He would have let the man do anything.

He would have felt he deserved it.

Will shifts, and as his head lolls limply on the mattress he catches sight of the chaise lounge. The white paper of the sketch Hannibal had set aside.

It was Will, tangled in a sea of satin, gazing up at the first rays of dawn like Psyche the morning after. A look of confusion and rapture on his face. A crown of bones in his hair.

*This was a test.*

Will realizes as the smell of blood returns and awareness of his surroundings seeps back in.

*The bloody bed was a test.*

He wonders distantly, as his body turns boneless and the adrenaline fades, if he possesses the fortitude to withstand the next one.

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The stage blooms with navy and blue. Mephistopheles voice booms out from the gloom, rising cold and dark from ocean black waters, the current of the devil, the leviathan from the deep. His baritone echoes with the stain of permanence, the terrible ring of the undying.

Je puis contenter ton caprice

I can satisfy your whims.

Mephistopheles voice merges with Hannibal's, with the devil in the opera box and the nightmare in his bed. He turns and stares at Will with covetous eyes, his voice a poisoned rapture.

Faust responds to Mephistopheles in hope and terror.

Et que te donnerai-je en retour?

And what will I give you in return?

Will trembles, cries out at the intrusion, the burn of being loved and hollowed.

Ici, je suis à ton service,

Hannibal and the devil's words run from French to English.

Here, I am at your service,

A terrible proclamation

Mais là bas, tu seras au mien!

A poisoned promise made by a monster.

But, there, you will be at mine!

To be loved by the void,

Fantôme adorable et charmant!

And kissed by emptiness.

Phantom, adorable and charming!

The devil's tenderly links his hand hand in his.

A moi ton ivresse, à moi tes plaisirs!

Reverent death, shuddered with love.

pleasures!

For me your intoxication, for me your

~~~~~

Will awakens the next morning to a sharp knocking sound.

His eyes open to the white spackled ceiling, lumpy like cottage cheese left out to harden and curdle. And for a second he thinks it looks like the field outside his house after the first winter snow; crisp and colorless. The blanket of monotone hiding the riot of ridges and valleys beneath.

The sound of another knock echoes through the room.

Will turns to the hotel window only to cover his face from the glare. The morning sun is relentless and he must have slept uninterrupted until at least eight. Something unheard of for him in the middle of an investigation.

The third knock rings out.

“Hang on.” He calls out, pushing the covers off and grabbing his phone from the bedside table.

He didn't have any missed alerts. Jack would call if there had been another set of bodies.

Will staggers to the door, expecting a sniggering Price or a nameless agent with a manila folder of lab results. He rubs the sleep out of his eyes and opens the door.

Hannibal is standing there holding a midsize moving box, a look of polite enquiry on his face.

Will stares.

“What's that?” He mumbles, blinking at the cardboard disbelief, as if something so pedestrian might burst into flames after being handled by such an unlikely courier.

“Breakfast.” Hannibal gives a congenial smile. “May I come in?”

Will nods, stepping aside, face still perplexed.

“How much food is in there?” He asks, still staring at the oversized box.

“Enough.” Hannibal breezes in, making a beeline straight to the dining table on the opposite wall to unpack. Will stays on the other side of the room, grabbing a pair of pants from the dresser and pulling them on. Hannibal politely averts his gaze, opening the box and lifting out plates and tupperware.

A errant thought flickers to the forefront of Will's mind.

“What did you make?” His voice lowers.

“Smoked salmon croque madames.” Hannibal does not look up at his companion's suspicious tone. “Rhye and smoked salmon topped with dill, a bechamel sauce, comte cheese, and a fried duck egg œufs tournés.” He finishes laying out cups and a travel french press and pulls out a seat, looking at Will and gesturing toward the empty chair in front of him. “Please be seated.”

Will nods and walks over. It's not people.

Rather than take the proffered chair Will seats himself on the opposite side of the table. If Hannibal is annoyed by his behavior he doesn't show it. Instead he reaches into the oversized box and pulls out a massive bouquet of assorted scarlet flowers surrounding a single white rose.

“That had better not be for me.” Will narrows his eyes and stares.

“They are.”

“You brought me a bunch of flowers.” Will deadpans.

“Yes.” Hannibal's eyes twinkle as he presents the bouquet with a flourish.

“A bunch of flowers. Like you would a girl. For a date.” Will stares at the flowers now resting in his lap as if Hannibal had just presented him a bouquet of dead crabs.

“I am well aware of your gender.” Hannibal's eyes barely crinkle with restrained mirth as he pulls out a vase. “And I surmised that while you may not approve of my display you would appreciate my discretion.”

“Oh yeah, the box was real subtle.” Will agrees sardonically. “You only looked like the world's most over dressed UPS man.” Will looks down again at the the mass of blooms he still holds. “Seriously, what the hell?”

“I wished to start your day with beauty. ” Hannibal says simply. “They reminded me of you.”

“Flowers.” Will repeats flatly.

“Yes.”

Will stares at the riot of petals.

“Because of the murders.” He says with dawning recognition. “Scarlet for the hearts and the blood split. White for the damn eyeballs our killer keeps putting in these things.”

“I assure you I was thinking only of you.” Hannibal rebuffs lightly.

“Uh huh.”

“Arum for ardor, asparagus stalks for fascination, gladiolus for strength.” Hannibal lists the blooms with reverence as he were describing his favorite recipe.

“Let me guess,” Will sighs, prodding at the stark white blossom in the center. “The white rose for secrecy.”

“Fitting, but no.” Hannibal's tilts his head, considering, before slowly walking forward. “Do you know the origin of the red rose?”

“A symbol of passion throughout the ages.” Will drawls, unimpressed. “From the Greek eros to a rose.”

“Eros was the Greek name for Cupid.” Hannibal's looms over Will, his voice turning low and dangerous. “When Cupid took Psyche's virginity the blood on the sheets sprouted the first red rose.”

Hannibal leans down, his lips brushing the shell of Will's ear as his voice comes out a silken whisper.

“One day I will present you a crimson rose, Will.” His hands trail over his jaw. “On the day you exchange white for red.”

Will shudders, remembering being splayed over Hannibal's lap, the doctor's fingers brushing lightly over his ass.

“I am not a wilting virgin,” Will means to sound angry but instead it comes out breathless. “You've already taken my innocence.”

*“Il mio falchetto, il mio cuore letali,”* Hannibal whispers fiercely, “We have only begun our sweet consummation.”

Will shivers, feeling his head tilt and the doctor's lips trail down his neck.

“Hannibal....” And Will hates himself for how his protest comes out a moan.

Hannibal rears back, the barest trace of smug satisfaction curling at his lips.

“But I am being selfish.” He purrs like a large cat; affectionate yet suddenly aloof. “You must be hungry.”

And just like that he is all business again, lifting the flowers into the vase and taking his seat.

Will grits his teeth, willing his body back under control.

“When we finish eating take them with you.” Will grinds out. “I don't want the overwrought sexual overture flowers you arranged in my hotel room.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. “What makes you think I arranged them?”

“Please.” Will glares, handing the bouquet over. “You are too snobby to have seen these at the supermarket. You went to a specialty florist to get your hands on such a random bunch of symbolic dead pla--”

Will trails off abruptly, his eyes glazing over.

*In the center of the table sits a bright bouquet of yellow day lilies, trailing bluebells, and blood red peonies. The flowers support two bleeding hearts and a pair of eyes nestle in the petals like hidden pearls.*

“Will.”

*Yellow dahlias, chartreuse roses, white lilies, dusty miller.*

“Will?”

*Magnolias, succulent, ranunculus, azalea blooms, and white roses*

Will's body snaps up like a whip as he shoots out of his seat. He can hear his heart hammering as he pulls out his phone and dials the head of the BAU.

The line is busy.

“I've got to find Jack.”

Will grabs his jacket from the dresser, fumbling with his wallet and keys as he darts out the door.

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Jack is talking on his cell while examining several folders with Price and four other agents. They are in one of the hotel conference rooms that have become the investigation's makeshift office spaces. Remnants of breakfast and coffee are scattered on the large round glossy black table.

“It's the flowers.” Will exclaims as he bursts through the door.

Jack looks up, something pleased blooming across his face as he interrupts the person on the other line. “I will call you back.” Jack gestures towards Will to continue as if he were his favorite child.

Will leans over the table, trying to catch his breath after running from his room like a bat out of hell. “The flowers are the key to everything.”

“We've already combed through every florist in Atlanta.” A younger female agent beside Price interrupts, frowning. “They were all dead ends.”

Will looks at the young woman, dirty blond hair and deep scars from what had once been terrible acne. She could have been one of his students.

“Not a florist.” Will explains, moving his hands in an agitated manner. “Who is just as intimately familiar with flowers, with their symbolism, and can access them wholesale?”

“Landscape?” Price wrinkles his brow. “Horticulturalist?”

“All of the murders were set up like a stage. Price you said it yourself, they could be scenes from an interior design magazine. And what did all the couples have in common?” Will makes a wild gesture at the tired looks he receives. “They were all wealthy, in love, and had been married for under a year. Now who would have intimate knowledge of their lives, flowers, and décor?”

“Will just say it.” Jack is getting impatient.

The younger female agent looks up at Will, her mouth falling open in small O. He smiles, noticing the ring on her left hand. She has figured it out.

“It's the wedding planner.” Will spreads his hands. “Our couples will all have had the same wedding planner, someone who knew about their lives – about their *love lives* – and builds tributes to romance on a daily basis. That is their common connection and that is how we will find their killer.”

Jack makes a sharp motion with his wrist and the four agents beside him are moving aside, making calls and frantically typing on laptops. Price looks unconcerned, texting something rapidly on his phone.

“Last night helped, didn't it?” Jack is radiating satisfaction on dangerous levels.

Will chokes. He can hardly tell Jack the breakthrough came from his psychiatrist bringing him flowers the morning after a night fooling around at a crime scene.

“Seeing the bouquet again helped.” Will says carefully. “Sometimes you just need to sleep on it.”

Jack nods, looking entirely unconvinced and immensely proud of himself.

“Is it possible The Cupid Killer is female?” Price asks, tapping his chin thoughtfully.

“Yes.” Will nods emphatically. “I still can't place the motive. It's like-” He pauses, unwilling to reveal what he has been envisioning lately. “The crime scenes have all felt aesthetically different. A female killer could account for that.”

“So could an immigrant, a teenager, a priest...” Price grins and waves his hand in circles, as if illustrating a gerbil wheel. “Anything outside of our norm of straight, white, heterosexual male.”

Will shrugs. Price is right in theory of course, but his intuition is screaming female. “If we are looking at the wedding planner or someone connected to them statistically speaking odds favor a woman.”

Zeller bursts in the room, his shirt untucked and a half eaten bagel hanging from his mouth. “We solved it?” He exclaims, looking at Price.

“Wonder boy thinks it's connected to the wedding planner.” Price holds his palms up. “Probable female. Maybe one bridezilla too many at work.”

The blond agent approaches the table again, pocketing her phone. She looks at Jack, her eyes bright with excitement. “We've just confirmed the wedding planner was the same for all three

couples. Deborah Hamilton – forty three year old white female.”

“There is our suspect.” Will nods.

“Doesn't the moniker 'the gentle sex' mean anything anymore!” Zeller cries out in mock indignation.

“I wish Beverly were here to smack you for that.” Price glowers as if Zeller had just demanded the female agents in the room get him coffee.

Zeller glances at Will, the tilt of his shoulders slumping slightly. “Yeah, well I guess you will have to pick up the slack.”

Price pulls a latex glove from his pocket and snaps it theatrically. “With pleasure.”

“You need a sterile glove to slap him?” Will deadpans.

“You don't know where he's been.” Price pulls a face.

“Ladies.” Jack all but growls. “We have a suspect. Get to work or I will find you something to do.”

“We have a hit.” An older agent with receding salt and pepper hairline looks up from his laptop at Jack. “Deborah Hamilton is in the Fulton County Police Department's Incident Logs.”

“Complaint?” Zeller stuffs the rest of his bagel in his mouth. “Petty theft?”

“Victim.” The agent shakes his head. “Her husband burned their house down when she refused to sign divorce papers. She cited religious reasons. Their seven children were inside along with a babysitter. No one survived.”

“Who has seven kids these days?” Price exclaims.

“Catholics.” Zeller offers with an expression that speaks volumes about his religious upbringing.

“Sir.” The older agent looks up at Jack. “The date of the incident report is exactly one year from the date of our first murder.”

“What an anniversary.” Zeller whistles at Price.

Will ignores them. He stares at the salt and pepper agent, an image taking form in his mind.

Religious.

“Love makes us blind and heartless but I gave them the American Dream.”

Deborah, prophetess of God and the Israelites

“Our killer is painting with stereotypes. The omission of children is deliberate.”

A quiver of broken arrows shoved halfway under the bed.

You made your bed, now lay in it.

Broken arrows.

“She is a Quiverfull.” Will sighs, scrubbing his fingers through this hair.

“Like Andrea Yeats?” Price looks surprised.

“The crazy lady who drowned her five kids in a bathtub in the early 2000's?” Zeller frowns.

“Technically she had postpartum psychosis, but yes.” Price nods. “She was acquitted via insanity. It was a sad case.”

“Quiverfulls are a minor subset of Evangelical Christians who believe children are our purpose on earth and the only way to heaven. The more the better.” Will clears his throat. “Our Cupid Killer isn't concerned with love at all.” He turns, beginning to pace. “Our couples were practicing family planning. Most likely they had already decided they didn't want children and had taken the appropriate measures.”

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD.” Price quotes. “Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.”

Zeller stares. Price only shrugs. “I followed that trial closely.”

Will thinks back to the conversation with Hannibal in the hotel kitchen. The doctor's dark eyes and the buzz of wine on an empty stomach.

“Must you possess progeny to form a family?” Hannibal did not look up from his plating.

“Yes, well no, but not here.” Will waved his hand in agitation, suddenly struck with an idea. “Our killer is painting with stereotypes. The omission of children is deliberate.”

“Maybe he thought they did not deserve them.”

“She denied them their hearts and their hearts desire because they could not see.” Will murmurs, quoting his earlier words to Hannibal. “She had already lost her way to heaven. They threw away theirs.”

“So sad.” The blonde female agent cocks her head sympathetically. “Do you have children, Mr. Graham?”

Will looks up startled. And for a moment she is not an agent in her early thirties but Abigail, smiling sad and sweet.

“No.” He chokes, chest unbearably tight. “My quiver is empty.”

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Will stumbles back into his hotel room that evening like a dead man. The room is semi-dark, the orange glare of the streetlights streaming through the open curtains to cast the room in carnival hues of yellow and purple. He doesn't bother with the lights.

Will toes out of his shoes, removing his button-up shirt and pants before collapsing on the bed and closing his eyes.

The smell of soft perfume jerks them back open.

There, on the small round dining table by the window, sits Hannibal's bouquet. The flowers branch up from the surface like the silhouette of some terrible tree, growing from the shadows to thrive in the darkness.

Will rises like a wraith and approaches the bouquet with trembling hands.

Deborah Hamilton occupied in modest ranch house in Lawrenceville, far out past the Northeast side of the Atlanta suburbs into more affordable rural real estate. The house was brick with blue shutters, two large sweet gums and a tulip poplar stood bare in the front yard.

When then SWAT team burst down the door it was like entering a funeral home. Wreaths of calla lilies, stargazer lilies, and hyacinth draped the walls. Shrines with photographs of bright eyed children and porcelain angels covered every available surface. Some of the shrines had ceramic urns. Children's ashes, their baby teeth and tiny bones ground to grey dust.

Will followed behind the task force, hands trailing the soft white trumpet blooms.

On the coffee table sat a picture of a ten year old girl with pale skin, blue eyes, and dark hair. Calla lilies are draped around the image, giving the low table the appearance of a small child's casket.

She didn't look like Abigail. Not really. Too young. Too many freckles and her bangs are cut in a blunt fringe.

Will stared anyways.

Will isn't aware of grabbing the bouquet in the darkened hotel. Only shredding it in his hands, crushing the velvet petals in his fists until they turn to a wet pulp. The room smells of perfume and fresh cut grass and his eyes burn from it all.

And as he crushes the red blooms, crushes them into crimson ruin in his fingers, he imagines Hannibal's throat beneath his hands, soft and fragile. The hands that caressed him reaching out. The lips that kissed him turning blue.

“I promised you a reckoning.” He chants, over and over.

He wonders if he still means it.

Deborah fires two shots from the master bedroom before they restrain her. Will is still standing by the coffee table, holding the picture of not-Abigail in trembling fingers, when they escort her down the stairs.

“Don't touch her!” The woman screams, barreling past two agents to lunge at Will before they tackle her to the carpet.

“Don't touch my baby.” She is crying, screaming up at Will with large brown eyes. As if Will were the reaper himself, had built her tiny casket of steel and tears. “He took her from me. Took our children into the dark to hurt me. Took her when I wouldn't give him what he wanted.”

Will watches as the room tilts and spins.

He took her from me.

Took her when I wouldn't give him what he wanted.

“I can still fix it with the Lord.” She is sobbing, trying to crawl towards him but the SWAT team have her pinned flat. “You have to let me go. You have to let me do God's work.”

Will cannot breath. He stands transfixed as they lead her away. Her words echoing in the empty place in his chest, like a bullet ricocheting off his ribs to lodge deep in his lungs.

“Who's gonna guide them to heaven now?” She screams. “Who's gonna undo the father's curse?”

Will is holding the white rose in his open fist. His face is wet and he realizes distantly he is crying. Great heaving sobs in the darkened room.

Remnants of red are smeared all over his hands, and he ought to crush it. Grind it beneath his heel like the last fragments of his wretched heart. And he does throw it down. Throws it as if he has been burned. But his foot never moves.

The only thing worse than Abigail's death is the loneliness that remains.

And he whispers, whispers to himself in the gloom, that he will crush it one day. He will crush it when the time is right. When Hannibal is in his grasp and submits his throat to his snare.

On the day Will trades white for red.

Will falls in the bed, curling in on himself, wishing for whiskey and sweet oblivion.

He dreams of Abigail, of fishing with her in the river. Yet the stream is black and the banks are red. The current is strong and it sweeps her away. Will swims and swims to find her but only hurtles faster and faster towards the rocks. And as he dashes against them, feels his bones break against their strength, he thinks '*just so*'.

When Will awakens at dawn he plucks the white rose from its stem. He glances around the room for what he will need before he spies the Gideon Bible in the bedside drawer, laughing brokenly at the page it opens to.

He places Hannibal's promise between the verses of scripture, closing his curse in the mouth of a distant God.

He packs the Bible with the rest of his things, cheap ink smearing his resolve on white petals.

*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing,
but the flesh is weak.*

Chapter End Notes

I never got this chapter to where I wanted it. When I originally wrote this it felt both too explicit and too raw in terms of the personal experience it conveyed. I kept looking for ways to rewrite the power dynamics to be less psychologically horrifically vulnerable while still kinky af (ie: keep the smut, trash the self loathing). I also wanted more opera, but so much of Will's seduction, confusion, and longing seemed to be turning into free form poetry rather than paragraph.

Looking back never I was never able to rewrite this to my satisfaction because the horror - and the psychology behind it - was such an integral part of this seductive relationship, I could not dampen or rework the inherent rawness of that dynamic or what I was trying to explore. This chapter still feels deeply personal and far too much and yet not enough, but maybe that is okay. Fan fiction can be weirdly hot, uncomfortable, and deeply contradictory - that is why it has the power it does, it is big enough to hold messy and confusing feelings. Sometimes something births itself, and you cannot change its form without erasing the deeper thing it inadvertently captures.

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